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- KEITH L. OWEN, *Wildlife Service, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington;*  
 MAURICE G. SELL, *1980 Phillips Drive, Northglenn, Colorado, USA*



## SHORT NOTE

## Fledgling Starling finds itself a foster home

Human disturbance often causes nestlings to leave their nest prematurely, but their fate is seldom known. During a study of the physical condition of Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) chicks in relation to brood size (Thompson & Flux, in prep.) many complete broods were collected when about 21 days old from the 500 nest-box colony at Belmont, Lower Hutt, described by Flux & Flux (1981).

On 26 November 1984 two 21-day-old fledglings (chicks A and B) left box 1 on our approach and flew about 50 m before landing in rough grass, where we lost them; we collected the third (C). Four days later we took six chicks from box 2, out of sight and 600 m from the first box. Only five chicks (D, E, F, G, H) had been present previously, and the sixth could be identified by toe-nail clips as chick A of the two fledglings lost from box 1. To reach box 2 in a direct line, it would have passed 5 occupied boxes, and 20 were within 200 m of this line. It appeared to have been pecked and was bleeding around the face, something not seen in 375 other chicks handled that year. Table 1 compares measurements of the lost fledgling with its sibling in box 1 and with later companions in box 2. The pair (A and B) in box 1 were

TABLE 1 — Measurements of chick A compared with its sibling (C) and range of later companions (D-H). Fat index is the ratio of dry fat to dry fat-free residue

Bird	Age (days)	Weight (g)	Outermost primary (mm)	Longest rectrix (mm)	Fat index	Wet weight gut contents (g)
C	21	76	68	48	0.31	1.1
A	25	61	69	47	0.21	1.3
D-H	21	68-79	70-75	50-55	0.18-0.20	0.2-0.9

probably very alike on 26 November because they had grown at the same rate, being 33 and 32 g on day 6 and 73 and 76 g on day 12, respectively.

It is interesting that fledgling A had apparently been deserted by its parents, which had only two chicks to care for; that it had found a foster home for itself among five younger but larger chicks; and that it was being fed and was still the fattest, albeit lightest, chick in the box, despite having been injured by the other chicks, their parents, or while trying to enter some other box. Young scroungers trying to enter boxes are chased vigorously by adult Starlings (Flux 1978) and such treatment may explain the reduced body weight and apparent check in flight feather growth of this enterprising fledgling.

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JOHN E.C. FLUX and CHARLES F. THOMPSON, *Ecology Division, DSIR, Private Bag, Lower Hutt*. Present address of CFT: *Department of Biological Sciences, Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois 61761, USA*