

LETTERS

The Editor,

15 June 1979

Sir,

Are Birds Strategists ?

Of course, Archie Blackburn is right. Surely our expatriate New Zealander writing from Canada (*Notornis* 26: 99-100) stands condemned out of his own mouth when he equates the correct use of scientific or technical terms with jargon. As for "streamlining technical communication," when intelligent scientists or thinkers (of different disciplines) converse together, they may take shortcuts by using such terms; but do they really want their talk to sound like the whine of a shell, a high-powered car or jet plane, which in their fields are the acme of streamlining ?

The practice of dressing up statements of observed facts or basically simple hypotheses in high-fallutin' language is to be deplored. It tends to give to words which have a long historic usage a meaning which they cannot bear, because of the many and varied implications of the original word.

When the introduced Chaffinch and Goldfinch build their nests in New Zealand, those nests are uncannily similar to the nests which their ancestors were building in Europe a hundred years ago in a very different environment. Put it down to blind instinct; and say that that means nothing. It is simply defining something obscure by something even more obscure — *obscurum per obscurius*, as the old classicists used to say. But it works and it is not the result of a carefully planned strategy.

Surely strategy implies the study of a host of logistics in order to defeat or outwit a powerful enemy, known or suspected. A glance at human history shows that much strategy has been disastrous because it was based on miscalculation or ignorance. Nature may know a little better. Define the methods by which she achieves her ends as you will; but they are not strategies. Nor are the Chaffinches and Goldfinches in our gardens strategists.

R. B. SIBSON

The Editor,

25 April 1979

Sir,

With the current concern for the survival of the North Island Kokako, I feel obliged to point out that the data presented by Mr Lavers (*Notornis* 25: 165-185) actually indicate an increase from 35 grid

squares occupied pre-1900 to 81 in the 1960-1970 period. The story gleaned from his maps is as follows:

No. grid squares	Pre-1900	1900-1939	1940-1960	1960-1970
	35	40	51	81

Mr Lavers claims on p. 173 "However, it was not until the 1960s that, with added concern for this rare bird, more people began to record sightings *and the extent of this contracting distribution became evident.*" The reader can find other statements in his paper which cannot logically be drawn from the data it presents.

JOHN M. CLARK

Dudley Road East, RD 6, Inglewood.

The Editor,
Sir,

13 June 1979

Mr Clark is correct in pointing out that there is an increase in the number of grid squares with Kokako from before 1900 until 1970. However, it cannot be inferred from this that the Kokako has increased numerically or that the pattern of distribution has been enlarged, as your correspondent may be suggesting.

Of the few records available for the early period, most give only vague locality references, whereas the more numerous reports over the past two decades can usually be placed in a particular grid square. This tends to show an *apparent* increase in distribution in certain districts (Rotorua, South Auckland, Taranaki and Urewera) where in fact, with a reduction in forest area, such an increase is most unlikely.

The only conclusion that can be drawn from the available records is that the distribution has contracted in areas to the north and south of the Volcanic Plateau as suitable forest habitat has been removed.

R. B. LAVERS

P.O. Box 149, Te Anau.



REVIEWS

The Dromornithidae, an extinct family of large ground birds endemic to Australia, by Pat Vickers Rich. Bulletin 184. Bureau of Natural Resources, Geology and Geophysics. Canberra 1979.

In this profusely illustrated book of 196 pages, Dr Pat Vickers Rich has done for the Dromornithidae what Sir Gilbert Archey and Dr W. R. B. Oliver did for the Dinornithiformes of New Zealand, and he has done it excellently, despite one of the biggest handicaps that any avian osteologist can encounter — no cranial material; so that the