

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