

discoveries, in accordance with the recognized practice of the medical profession, become available for use of the Crown in the same way as for any members of the public. The only award recommended under Head 4 of the Warrant was for a claim in respect of the Sommerfeld track.

THE CATTLE EGRET

AN Old World bird which is a constant companion of cows has become established in the United States in the past fifteen years. Unknown there before its first appearance in Florida in 1942, there are now approximately two thousand birds in that State, according to Alexander Sprunt, jun., of the National Audubon Society (Smithsonian Institution News Release, April 13).

The bird is *Bubulcus ibis*, the cattle egret, which has been well known for many years in southern Europe, Africa and the Middle East. It is a small white egret with dark-brown feet and yellow legs and bill and is most remarkable for its strange, constant association with cattle. The close proximity to cattle is little short of astonishing. It keeps pace with the animal continually, usually close by the head, but sometimes near the fore or hind feet and occasionally under the abdomen. When an insect is disturbed, the bird darts out, catches it and returns. Now and then it reaches up and takes something from the body of the cow, or its legs. At times, the cow may be seen to push the bird aside with its muzzle, but appears not to object otherwise to the immediate closeness of its satellite.

A peculiar and unexplained characteristic of the bird is its habit of weaving the head and neck from side to side. A bird will suddenly stop feeding, stand perfectly upright, and weave the upper part of the body.

It feeds chiefly on grasshoppers and crickets. This may explain its fondness for cattle, which disturb these insects in the grass while grazing.

How the cattle egret got to the New World, especially the United States, is difficult to explain. It was first observed in British Guiana in 1937, but did not appear in the United States until five years later.

The cattle egret population is concentrated in Florida; but stray specimens have been observed as far north as Maine, and even Newfoundland, and inland to Chicago. Sprunt believes that a few pairs may have been blown over the Atlantic by wind currents.

SEA-BIRDS IN SWEDEN

IN 1950, regulations came into force in Sweden prohibiting the shooting of sea-birds during the early months of the year. The Swedish Institute of Forest Zoology has now completed investigations to show the effects of these regulations (Bull. Roy. Sch. Forestry, Stockholm, Sweden, No. 22; 1956). These show that everywhere the eider has increased substantially in numbers, while stocks of the velvet scoter were generally unchanged. This species usually arrives at the breeding places so late that it is scarcely affected by the legal spring shooting. There is, accordingly, a substantial difference between the eider and the velvet scoter in this respect, which

supports the assumption that the prohibition of spring shooting—which applied only to the eider—had a salutary effect on the stock of that species.

The general trend regarding the stocks of Swedish sea birds since the new regulations were introduced has led to the following conclusions.

There is little possibility of distinguishing between male and female birds. Even if differentiation were possible, the male bird in the spring would still be essential for breeding. The risks of wounding birds in the large spring flocks are greater than those in the autumn shooting of migratory birds.

Birds are being shot which have been produced at other places and, at this time of the year, are returning to their production areas. This shooting cannot be motivated by game protection.

Although the amended regulations of 1950 have been of some benefit—indeed, of very appreciable benefit in the case of the eider—further review of the problems of spring shooting is now required.

The question of restricting spring shooting rights to the coastal population should be carefully considered, regardless of whether the shooting is done in public or private waters.

Should this prove impracticable, it is recommended that a general ban on spring shooting be introduced and that the coastal population be compensated by granting them prolonged autumn and winter shooting rights.

Permission might also be given for the limited shooting of male birds in production zones having well-ordered sea-bird protection. A certain amount of spring shooting along the migratory routes beyond the skerries but outside the production zones proper might be permitted as a transitional measure.

EVENING INSTITUTES IN BRITAIN

THE most popular studies pursued at evening institutes are those offering instruction in household handicrafts. More than a quarter of the student body registered, totalling nearly one and three-quarter million, are women taking classes in cooking, catering, home-furnishings, needlework and similar subjects for the improvement and decoration of the home.

This significant change in the character of evening classes is revealed by a Ministry of Education survey designed to help local education authorities, principals of institutes and teachers to meet the changing needs of young people and adults for purposeful leisure-time study and occupation*.

The change in public taste, and also in social conditions over a period of twenty years or so, is reflected in subject and attendance figures given. Between 1930 and 1952, the numbers of students studying vocational subjects in evening institutes declined considerably, while the numbers taking non-vocational subjects, such as art, music, handicrafts, dancing, and so on, increased. During this period vocational studies have to a great extent been transferred from evening to day work, largely as a consequence of the increasing readiness of employers to give young people time off during the day for study. The full-time work in technical colleges also increased greatly over the period.

* Evening Institutes. Ministry of Education Pamphlet No. 29. (London: H.M.S.O.) 3s. net.