

the salamander, *Spelerpes bilineatus*, recently kept for several months at this laboratory.

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#### ALBINISM IN THE ENGLISH SPARROW

THE notes on albinism in the English sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) appearing in SCIENCE of January 1 and February 12 suggest the desirability of placing on record certain similar observations made by the present writer. While residing in Chicago, from June, 1904, to May, 1908, I noted English sparrows showing partial albinism in the streets on many occasions. The extent of the white markings on these birds varied from a few feathers to perhaps a third or a fourth of the whole bird, no pure white individual being seen. The striking feature of the occurrence of these white marked birds was their abundance in the late summer and early fall of each year. At that season partial albinos were seen at least several times a week, sometimes daily for three or four days. By early spring these abnormal birds had disappeared; at any rate I have no notes regarding their observation at that time of the year. From these facts it would seem as though the numerous white-spotted birds seen in the fall were immatures of the previous summer. Also for some reason, perhaps connected with their conspicuous appearance, but few of them survived until the beginning of the following breeding season.

The common appearance of partial albinism in the English sparrow in a country where it has been recently introduced through human agency, as compared with the rarity of this phenomenon among most native birds, is suggestive of this being in some way an outcome of unusual conditions surrounding the species in its adopted home. In the absence of data regarding the sparrow in its native land, however, this is mere speculation.

Observations along the same line regarding another species of bird may have some significance. In southern California the Brewer blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) has taken most kindly to the altered conditions brought

about by settlement of the country, breeding in the shrubbery of parks and gardens, and feeding on the lawns throughout the towns. In Exposition Park, Los Angeles, the broad stretches of lawn have been particularly attractive to these grackles, and, especially in the fall, they gather here in large flocks. Partial albinism among these birds, just as with the English sparrows seen about Chicago, is of common occurrence in the late summer and fall, on several occasions two or even three white-spotted birds being in sight at the same time. The white areas of the birds observed were always of small size. None of these abnormal individuals has been noted in the spring. The question again suggests itself as to whether these grackles are not affected by something in the altered environment, the changed conditions having been obviously most favorable to the species and conducive to great increase in numbers.

In this connection, however, it is interesting to note that still another bird, the house finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus frontalis*), which has so adapted itself to urban conditions as practically to occupy in the towns of the southwest the position held elsewhere by the English sparrow, in all its vastly increased numbers shows no tendency toward albinism, at any rate no more than any other native bird.

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TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: On page 26 of the current volume of SCIENCE Mr. P. J. O'Gara asks for information regarding albinism among English sparrows. I have frequently seen nearly white specimens, especially in New York City, but never any that were entirely white. I believe that albinism occurs more frequently in this species than in any other, because the natural enemies that pick off the conspicuous individuals of other species do not dare to molest the sparrows in their close proximity to man. Thus individuals with albinistic tendencies are enabled to breed and these tendencies are transmitted to their offspring. MAUNSELL SCHIEFFELIN CROSBY

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: In the issue of SCIENCE for January 1, there is a note by P. J. O'Gara on albinism in the English sparrow. As he asks for further observations I may say that I do not believe partial albinism is at all rare in the English sparrow. Although I have not recently observed any in this part of the country, some years ago, when living in Oregon, I used frequently to see English sparrows that were partial albinos associating with normal members of the same species.

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WITH reference to Dr. O'Gara's note on the above subject in your issue of January 1, 1915, I may state that in England it is of comparatively common occurrence. Cases are frequently reported in the *Field* newspaper, and I have known of three examples myself. Partially white birds are by no means rare.

I also possess a specimen procured by my brother at Mosul in Asia Minor.

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TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: In your issue of January 1, Dr. P. J. O'Gara, of Salt Lake City, Utah, states that on several occasions last summer he saw a single female English sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) in the busy streets of Salt Lake City with a pure white plumage. He had never seen any reference to albinism in the English sparrow, and he asks if other observers have found this character to be common in that bird.

In reply, I may say that albino sparrows are fairly frequently seen in different parts of New Zealand. I have about 600 correspondents in the domain who send me notes on natural history, and I have received from them about a score of albino sparrows. These birds were first introduced into New Zealand in 1867, and now are the worst of all the bird pests. Albinism also is not unusual in the English blackbird (*Turdus merula*) in New

Zealand; several complete albinos have been reported to me.

It is interesting to note that our native birds show a very marked tendency towards albinism. There are few species of native birds that do not show this tendency. It is very noticeable in the Kiwi (*Apteryx*), whose soft, fluffy plumage, when pure white, is surpassingly beautiful. Our native birds also have a tendency towards melanism, but this is not so marked as the albinistic characteristic.

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### QUOTATIONS

#### AN ATTACK ON THE HEALTH LAW OF NEW YORK STATE

LAST week we commented briefly upon the first annual report of the New York State Public Health Council, congratulating our fellow citizens upon the results of the council's activities and upon the framing of a new sanitary code for the state. And even as we were penning the lines several bills were being introduced into the state legislature which, if adopted, would seriously cripple the work of the commissioner of health and nullify the new sanitary code.

These bills, fathered by Assemblyman Hinman of Albany, five in number, are in the shape of amendments to the public health law. The first (Int. 1561) is directed against the commissioner of health and instead of the present injunction that he "shall not engage in any occupation which would conflict with the performance of his official duties," orders that he "shall devote his entire time to the duties of his office." This is perhaps the least objectionable of the proposed amendments, apart from the insulting innuendo concealed in it, for the duties of the commissioner of health are so exacting as practically to demand his entire time in any case. The second bill (Int. 1600) will, if it becomes a law, seriously interfere with the sanitary work in the state, for it reduces the number of sanitary districts from a minimum of twenty to a maximum of ten, and at the same time fixes the salary of the sanitary supervisor of each district at a maximum of \$2,500. In other words, it doubles