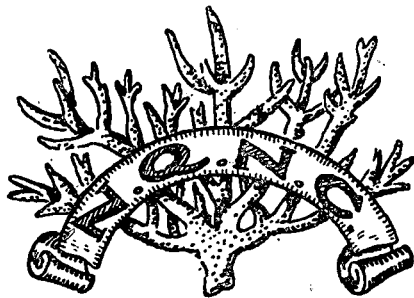


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# THE NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALIST



**CAIRNS**

**Journal of  
NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALIST CLUB**

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"Each author is responsible for the opinions and facts expressed in his or her article".

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1087

## NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALISTS' CLUB

Founder Presd. the late Dr. HUGO FLECKER.

**OBJECTS** — The Furtherance of the Study of the various branches of Natural History and the Preservation of Our Heritage of Indigenous Fauna and Flora.

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**GENERAL MEETING** for discussion, lectures, screenings and display of specimens are held on the second Tuesday, 8 p.m., at the Old Kuranda Barracks, Esplanade.

**FIELD DAY** excursion usually fourth Sunday.

**VISITORS** are welcome, especially members of Australian and Overseas Clubs and Societies.

**LIBRARY** open each Friday night at 7.30 p.m. and Club night.

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## EDITORIAL.

Once more we come to the end of the year and we feel that it has been quite a successful one. Meetings have been well attended as have the monthly Field Days. Yule Point, Black Mountain Road Goldsborough and Isabella Falls were some of the places visited where many things of interest were seen and collected. It is pleasing to welcome so many visitors — Interstate and Overseas — to these gatherings, when we can compare notes and ideas with members of other organisations and other countries.

Once more we congratulate Ian Orrell on his excellent essay on the Orb Weaving Spider which won him the Flecker Memorial Medallion. It is printed elsewhere in the journal. Well done Ian.

We must thank many of our members for welcome additions to our Library, — Mr. A. H. Bruce, Mr. Ziegenfusz, Mr. Read Mr. Cantrill, Miss Taylor and Mr. Whibley.

We regretfully announce the death of one of our old members — Mr. Daniel Peiniger who was recently killed in a road accident. Mr. Peiniger has been a member for many years, serving for several years on the Council. Owing to his advanced age he has been unable to attend meetings and Field Days of late and was missed by the members.

Now that the new year has commenced we have to ask once again if members will please pay their membership dues promptly to the Treasurer. It takes much time and money if the Treasurer has to write to all members reminding them of this and so we ask please send your dues without any more notice. Thank you.

Some time ago the Australian Museum requested the Club to send them if possible, Fresh Water Crabs for study. This month a bottle containing five Fresh Water Crabs was dispatched to them. We hope they will be of value to the Museum.

At this point the Editor would like to congratulate our President Mr. A. A. Read on his election once again. This makes it 14 years that Mr. Read has held the chair and this he has done right ably.



## A SEQUENCE OF EVENTS.

A few years ago I was staying with friends at Mackay. The bathroom was being rebuilt and during the process we had to use an old and rather dark temporary bathroom. As I entered it one evening, switching the light on I was just in time to see a large tarantula spider pounce on a large brown cockroach. The spider sat there proudly with the cockroach sideways across its mouth but its triumph was short lived for a large green frog sprang from a corner and in a second had eaten the two right up.

Next day I noticed at the end of the yard several ducks and some noise. To my astonishment I saw an extra large clean white duck with her neck outstretched and swallowing violently, and dangling from her mouth the protesting hind legs and half the body of the green frog. Even as I watched an extra large swallow made the whole frog disappear down the duck's neck. I could not help pondering how each living thing in turns seems to become food for some other living creature.

Two days later was Sunday and the duck was killed and provided the Sunday dinner so one could say from cockroach to spider to frog to duck to man. I do not care for duck much.

IRENE MEARS. — (14/2/62)

Not fiction but actual facts.

## REDISCOVERY OF AN ORCHID (*Bulbophyllum lilianae* Rendle) AFTER 44 YEARS.

Rupp and Hunt, Proc. Roy. Soc. Qld. 60:6, 62 (Dec. 1949), stated that no reference to this orchid had been made since its original description and apparently no reference has been made since 1949. In August 1961 Mr. K. Wadsworth of Millaa Millaa collected a small *Bulbophyllum* on the Evelyn Plateau, Nth. Queensland and sent part of it to the present author who thought it might have been a small *B. lageniforme* F. M. Bail. Subsequent examination of specimens of this latter species from 3 localities showed that Mr. Wadsworth's plant was not Bailey's species but Rendle's. This collection, only the second, after a lapse of 44 years, is a truly praiseworthy feat.

The following description and illustration were prepared from the above-mentioned fresh material :

*Bulbophyllum lilianae* Rendle, Journ. Bot. 55:308 (1917).

A small epiphyte. Rhizome about 0.75 mm diam., extensively creeping and branching. Roots rather short, about 0.4 mm diam. Pseudobulbs spaced at intervals of 5—15 mm between centres along rhizome, 6—11 x 3—5 mm, obliquely conical, shallowly sulcate, rhizome embracing. Leaves barely petiolate 15—27 x 4—6 mm, narrow-oblong. Peduncles 15—20 mm long, filiform. Pedicels, plus ovaries, about 2 mm long, tuberculate. Flowers solitary, widely expanding, reddish, the sepals and petals 3 nerved, the nerves not extending to the apices. Dorsal sepal about 5.0—6.3 x 2.0—2.8 mm, oblong-lanceolate sparsely tuberculate near the base. Lateral sepals 4.0—6.0 x 3.0—4.3 mm, ovate or subdeltoid, joined at their bases to form a truncate mentum. Petals 3.0—4.5 x 1.0—2.0 mm, oblong-lanceolate very obtuse. Labellum joined to the apex of the column foot by a short lorate claw, about 2.0—3.0 x 1.2—1.5 mm, erect in basal half (where obscurely lobed at the base), thence bent at right angles, lamina ovate or almost deltoid, obtuse, broadly grooved above (almost concave), margins deeply decurved or almost revolute, no ridges present unless the uppermost portion of the "rolls" from the groove to the margins be called such. Column about 1.5 x 1.3 mm with a greatly curved narrow foot about 1.5 mm long; wings very broad but short, truncate anteriorly but with an acute tooth on the apices, which extend about half way up the anther. Stigma subpyriform. Rostellum ovate, saecate. Anther broader than long, reniform when viewed from above, not rostrate. Collinia 4 in 2 pairs, pyriform when viewed from the side.

This species is perhaps most closely allied to *B. lageniforme* F. M. Bail but differs in the following respects :

(a) pseudobulbs spaced along rhizome instead of massed and are slender oblique-conical and shallowly grooved rather than broad, depressed and deeply grooved.

(b) Flowers about half the size, reddish rather than pale green and widely expanding.

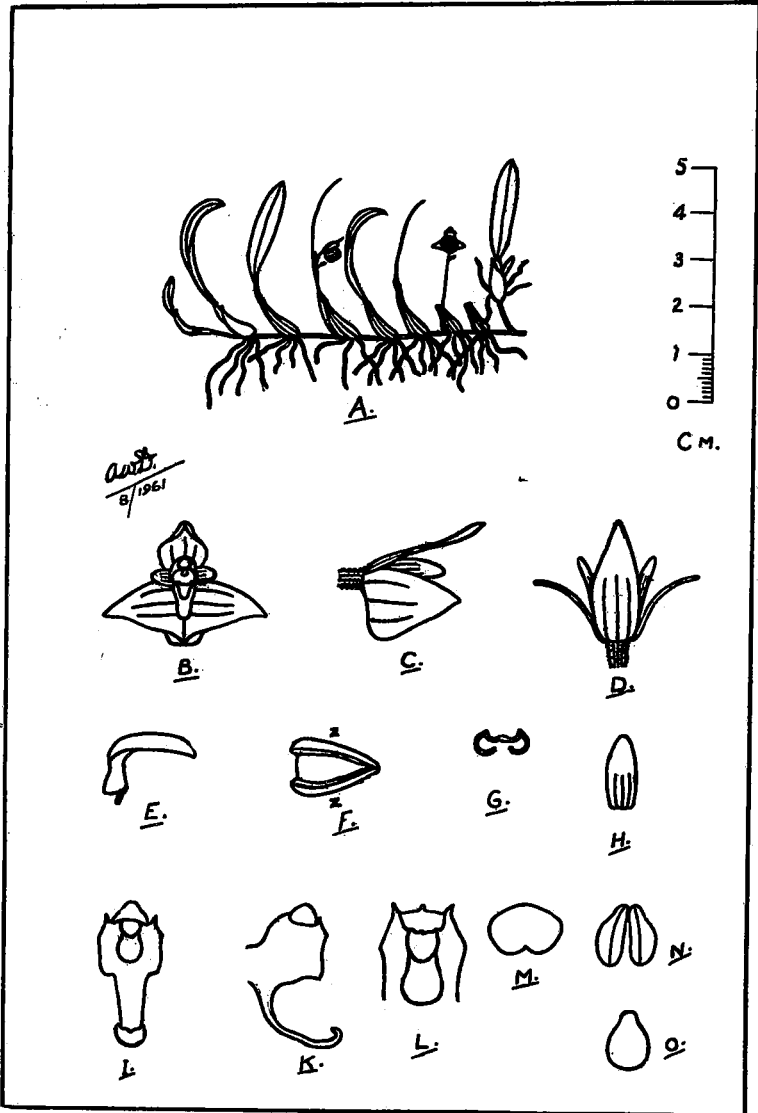
(c) Dorsal sepal longer than the lateral ones rather than the reverse.

(d) Labellum much smaller in relation to the remainder of the flower and lacks the central ridge.

(e) Stigma<sub>2</sub> pyriform rather than transversely oval.

A. W. DOCKRILL.

**BULBOPHYLLUM LILIANAE RENDLE**



A. Portion of Plant..... Natural Size  
 B. Flower from the Front..... x 5  
 C. Flower from the Side..... x 5  
 D. Flower from Above..... x 5  
 E. Labellum from the Side..... x 5  
 F. Labellum from Above..... x 10  
 G. Cross Section of Labellum at

H. Petal..... x 5  
 I. Column from the Front..... x 10  
 J. Column from the Side..... x 10  
 K. Top of Column (Anther Re-  
 moved)..... x 15  
 L. Anther from Above..... x 20  
 M. Pollinia from the Front..... x 30  
 N. Pollinium from the Front..... x 30  
 O. Pollinium from the Side..... x 30

## NOTES ON THE AUSTRALIAN PRATINCOLE

The years 1961 and 1960 have been very dry and arid over most of North Queensland, the more inland areas being drought stricken. Such conditions have caused a movement of several species of inland birds to the more favoured coastal and near coastal localities where suitable food supplies are more readily available.

A very graceful visitor is the Australian Pratincole (*Glareola isabella*.) Generally grouped among the shore birds (waders), Pratincoles like the Stone Curlew, have, over the ages, adapted themselves to the more arid inland conditions, the Australian Pratincole in particular extending its range to the centre of the continent.

Pratincoles are medium sized birds, nine to ten inches in length, and generally rufous in colour, the rump being white and the abdomen chestnut. The bill is short and the tail deeply forked. Having long legs and an upright stance. Pratincoles move swiftly over the bare ground which is the favoured habitat. It is said to feed mainly in the air, but I have not found this so in local areas. The local birds catch most of their food on the ground and only on rare occasions were birds seen to catch insects in the air the favoured food being newly hatched grasshoppers, which emerge from bare or plowed fields. When not engaged in keeping the grasshopper plagues in check, the birds engage in spectacular flights. Some of the flocks were quite extensive and several times during September 1961 over 100 birds were in the air. These long winged birds are very graceful whilst engaging in their erratic flight, wheeling and side slipping, occasionally just skimming the ground like swallows, calling out in a sweet voice.

It was in May 1960 that I first observed *Glareola* in local habitats and by the end of October all were gone. However, this year, 1961, the influx of birds arrived in May, large flocks regularly being observed until October when the flocks gradually became smaller and in November only a few birds remained.

It is believed the Australian Pratincole has a winter migration to the islands north of Australia including Borneo and Java. Closely related species are abundant in Africa and India where the birds are much in favour being known as Locust Birds.

Nesting of the Pratincole is on bare ground and the clutch is usually two or three eggs. The incubating period is approx. 18 days. Like other waders they adopt the "broken wing" display to lure enemies away from the nest site.

It will be of considerable interest to note if *Glareola* becomes a regular visitor to local habitats in the future years.

J. A. BRAVERY, Atherton.



## OBSERVATION ON FLYING FOXES.

Recently I went out to the Flying Fox camp on Snake Island in the Daintree River and examined some of the Mangrove Trees killed by the Foxes. I wished to find out why these trees had been killed and it did not take me long to find out the reason. The bark of the trees was absolutely scratched to pieces. When the Foxes were disturbed or were leaving the camp in the normal way, they climb up by means of their claws to get a clear site for launching into the air, and in so doing, day after day, they soon killed the trees.

There is a belief amongst a lot of people that Flying Foxes bring mosquitoes. This is not so here at anyrate, The Foxes have moved in the last few days to within a stones throw of my camp, and there has not been a mosquito in my camp since they came. Normally there are quite a lot of mosquitoes.

A FIELDING, Mossman.

## THE ORB-WEAVING GARDEN SPIDER.

The Orb-weaving Garden Spider is about 2-2½ inches in length from front to back legs. Her body itself is about an inch long and the abdomen about 8" long and at the widest ¾". All of her body, including her legs is a light brownish-grey, but the joints of her legs and abdomen are a dark brownish-red. She also had brownish-grey hairs on her legs and body. Her fangs dig in an insect horizontally.

**Habits** :— She sleeps in a curled up dried leaf similar in colour to herself. Her leaf is about 5 ft. from the ground. At dusk (6.15 p.m.) she was on the job. She climbed on to the cross bearer of the passion fruit trellis and faced her spinnerets to the sky and let the wind carry the fine strand of silk to a branch of the bouganvillea. When she had this guy-line erected she then spun silk round and round it all the way along to strengthen it. The next thing was to take a stay from the strong guy line to the ground. This kept the snare from blowing into a horizontal position in the breeze or strong wind. At 8.30 p.m. the web was completed and Mrs. Spider went to the centre of the web and waited for a foolish insect to fly into her well-made snare. The snare is about 2' 6" in diameter.

Just then a medium sized moth flew into her snare. She immediately darted to the insect and fanged it, she then plastered it with thick masses of silk which were wrapped round the moth with the back legs. The silk was divided into two parts shaped in a V with the apex at the spinnerets. She then attached her spinnerets to the part of the web around the moth and let out one strand of silk. With the claws on her back legs she cut the strand. This was done all around the bound moth. She grasped it in her fangs and moved to the centre of her web where she then wrapped the moth and the piece of web cut out onto one large ball with some more thick silk. Then she had her evening meal.

On the few nights around the date of the full moon she would not make a snare at all, but she only hung from a strand of silk in the shadow close to the trellis. As the moon grew smaller she moved out towards the centre of the strong guy-line.

At 5 a.m. next morning while it was still pitch dark there was no sign of the well-made snare but there was only the strong guy-line and the stay.

The strong guy-line is about 16' 6" in length and about 6' from the ground and the stay is about 6' from the guy-line to the ground.

A snare and guy-lines, similar in shape to that of the Orb-weaving Garden Spider were found about 2" away from the black wall of a shed. The bottom of this snare was about 1' from the ground. It was 21" in diameter and it was found that it belonged to a young Orb-weaver. She left her web up all the time and the web can hardly be seen. When she cut out a piece of web with a bound insect she left the hole there all that night and the next day and on the following night she set to work and patched it.

When Mrs. Spider was under observation by torch light and two 200 watt bulbs her habits differed. A piece of linen thread was tied across from the passion-fruit trellis to a branch of the bouganvillea in place of the strong guy-line. She accepted this offer. She didn't come out of her cosy leaf until 7.10 p.m. because I was switching the torch on and off trying to observe how she began her work. She climbed on to the cross-bearer of the trellis and finding that there was a strand of something there she began to spin silk round and round to strengthen it. I switched lights off and let her continue her evening work. At 7.45 p.m. lights on again. She had the main frame of her web built. Her stay was put down and the main-bearers of the web were built. At 8.30 lights were on again. She had completed about 1/5 of the hair fine circular part of the web.

Building was further delayed for another five minutes when a stick

## THE ORB WEAVING GARDEN SPIDER — (Continued)

insect was thrown into the uncompleted web. She immediately fanged it and then she plastered it with very thick masses of silk which were wrapped round the legs first and both legs and long thin body. As before the silk was divided into parts and the web was cut in the same way. She took him in her fangs and moved to the centre of her web and she hung him in a horizontal position by two strands of silk. She then patched the web where the piece had been cut out and continued to build her snare. At 9.15 p.m. the lights were switched on and she had completed about another 6" of the fine circular part of the web. At 9.45 p.m. when the lights were turned on, she had about  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the web completed (23ins). At 10.45 p.m. when I last saw her that night she had the web finished and was feeding off the bound stick-insect.

She didn't like being observed by torch-light and two 200 watt. bulbs so she moved camp on another part of the Farm about 85 yards away. She was moved back to her old place. Her banana leaf was cut, taken to the passion-fruit trellis and pushed into the tangled vine. That night she made her web in the same position but next morning she was gone. Mrs. Spider had moved to the fence line of bananas 35 yards away. The banana leaf was cut and tied securely to the trellis. This time she built the guy-line from the trellis to the shed and the stay was built on to the back of the car. The next morning she was gone and I haven't seen her since.

These observations have been made over a period of six weeks.

Name :— IAN ORRELL, age 13 years..

Address :— Box 1, Smithfield via Cairns, Nth. Qld.

—o—

## POT POURRI.

There's no doubt about it, we Naturalists do see weird things in peculiar places. A friend of ours a keen naturalist is Night Porter at a Hotel in the North. One night whilst engaged in the cheerful occupation of cleaning the urinals, he noticed some little "wrigglers" in the troughs. On inspection they were found to be elvers. To get to that place, these elvers had swum up the pipe discharging into the sea, turned a right angle up and then through a grating and another right angle to get out into the troughs. The elvers were collected and preserved in alcohol and eventually sent to Mr. Whitley of the Australian Museum, Sydney, who identified them as Long Finned Freshwater Eels *Anguilla reinhardtii* Steindachner, 1867 and stated that they were evidently migrating inland from the sea. This took place in March 1962. The elvers have now been added to the Australian Museum Collection.

—o—

## ERROR.

In our last Journal there was an article by Mrs. E. Corbet on *Dysphania fenestrata*. This was stated to be the family ARCTIIDAE but we have now been informed by The Australian Museum that there was a clerical error made when writing to Mrs. Corbet informing her of this and should read family GEOMETRIDAE.



## SHINING STARLINGS (*Aplonis metallica*)

On November 14th 1960 the peace of our garden was shattered by the arrival of a colony of Shining Starlings who decided to build in the Rain Tree of Peru (*Samanea saman*) in our neighbours garden. This was the first time they had built there in the 10 years that we have lived in this district.

**Nesting.** There was a great deal of fighting and brawling as each pair of birds wanted the best site, the most favoured place being at the end of a branch. A Yellow Fig Bird (*Sphecotheres flaviventris*) was sitting on two eggs in a nest built on the outer end of a branch. One morning when the male Fig Bird was taking his turn in incubating, about half a dozen Starlings began to worry him, diving and pecking him till in exasperation he left the nest. Immediately two Starlings flew on to the nest, picked up the eggs in their beaks and dropped them over the side on to the grass beneath. My son ran into the garden to verify this and sure enough, there were the two broken Fig Bird eggs lying on the neighbours lawn. The Starlings then proceeded to incorporate the nest into their own. Other Fig Birds were nesting in the same tree but more to the inside and they were not molested at all by the Starlings. Obviously it was the nest site the Starlings wanted and it was not just animosity to another species of bird.

It was noticed that many of the breeding birds were still in immature plumage. Some pairs were both black, others were black and immature and yet again others were both immature. As the time went on the immature plumaged birds gradually became darker and darker until by the time they left us they only had an odd streak or so of white on their breast.

Materials used in the building were dried vines and grass with an occasional decoration of leaves. When the children threw some coloured paper streamers into the garden, they were eagerly snapped up and some of the nests were tastefully decorated with white and green streamers.

The actual building occupied about 14—18 days but all during incubation and feeding the birds were adding to their nests, poking and pulling at them like a woman titivating her hair. Usually about 3 or 4 nests were built in a bunch actually joined together. Always one bird was at the nest, probably because of the thieving ways of the others. I am sure if both birds had left the nest together, there would have been no nest to come back to. The moment a pair of birds turned their backs for a minute, other birds would be there to start pulling the nest to pieces and incorporating the material in their own nests. When a bird arrived at its nest with a long trail of dried vine and started to twist it into its nest, about half a dozen others would fly up to try and steal it. They would hang—a dead weight on the vine with the vine swinging to and fro like a pendulum. Sometimes half a dozen would all be hanging on the vine like an animated necklace. If a piece of material dropped towards the ground a number of birds would all make a dive for it, invariably one catching it before it reached the ground. When they started to build they would twist the vine round and round the branch following it around like a circus performer. The nests were large and bulky structures with a side entrance and when finally able to examine some there was no attempt to line with down or feathers, just some finer grasses.

**Brooding.** It was difficult to see if both birds took part in incubating as there was such constant coming and going and squabbling and fighting but it was my impression that both birds took their turn sitting.

**SHINING STARLINGS (*Aplonis Metallica*) — (Continued)**

The first egg shells were found under the tree on December 14th making it about 3 weeks from eggs to hatching. From the number of pieces of shell I would say that the average clutch was three. There was no effort made to dispose of the shells or hide them in any way, they were just pushed out of the nest to the ground below. One or two babies were found on the ground under the tree — little black naked squiggles.

The parents were kept very busy feeding the young, but as always there was one bird left at the nest all the time, usually spending its time tucking in stray ends and generally tidying up the nest. Soon it was possible to see small heads at the entrance of the nest and the moment the feeding adult appeared the mouth would gape open and a large berry was thrust into it. Underneath the tree there was a litter of different sorts of seeds regurgitated by both young and old. One of the neighbours complained that when they mowed the grass, their ankles were nearly flayed by the motor mower kicking up all the little hard seeds. Evidently there was not much effort at nest cleaning as when some of the nest blew down, there was quite a lot of excreta inside. January 31st was the first time I saw any of the young out of the nest. They were quite small—dark grey black, whitey yellow breast streaked with black and no red eye.

**Food.** The Starlings were very fond of cultivated fruits such as mulberries, which they ate unripe, pawpaws and custard apples. Of wild fruits they eat Birds Eye Chillies, Queensland Olive (*Linociera ramiflora*) Nutmegs (*Myrsitica muelleri*) and *Planchonella*. This was learned by taking seeds regurgitated to the Department of Agriculture where they were identified for me.

**Behaviour.** From daylight till dark there was a constant din from their fighting and thieving. For some reason, one nest was torn to pieces by a dozen or so birds, each one triumphantly taking loot home to incorporate in its own home. When the rest of the nest fell down, by the end of half an hour there was not a piece left on the grass as they all dived shrieking madly to tear it to bits.

Towards the end of their sojourn, many of the nests were getting very shaky and finally when a puff of wind came, they would fall down. The first one or two to fall were torn to pieces quickly, but all of a sudden the birds seemed to lose interest and the rest as they fell were left lying on the ground, thus giving us a chance to examine them.

The Starlings were very fond of bathing and many would come down to our little bird bath to drink and bathe. In the early mornings when there had been a heavy dew, they would land in the grass and bathe in the dew, moving off to another spot when they had shaken all the dew from one part.

Sometimes for no apparent reason, all the birds left in the tree would, with one accord, fly away in a flock leaving an unearthly silence. After a couple of minutes they would all circle and come back again, once more squawking and jostling.

Not all the birds nested at the same time, some not starting to build until the first lot had hatched. Despite this they all seemed to be ready at the same time to fly away. For some time before migrating the birds would roost in the tree at night, but during the day, old and young alike would

**SHINING STARLINGS (*Aplonis Metallica*) — (Continued)**

leave in the early morning and there was blessed silence until about an hour before dusk when they would all arrive back again. They finally left about the end of April.

Before leaving most of the nests that had not fallen, about three quarters of them, were deliberately pulled down by the birds. It seemed to be a sort of game with them.

At the beginning of August 1961 a small flock of about 5 birds arrived back in the tree. Gradually this advance guard began to build up until there was about 20—30 birds there. Some started to build, but this was too much for the owners of the tree who had had enough by this time. Every effort was made to discourage the birds—at least £1 worth of crackers were let off under the tree, but all that happened was that the birds flew off, circled once and arrived back again. A string was tied to the branch and every time the birds lighted, it was pulled and they were dislodged. This also failed to discourage them. At last a greater part of the tree was cut down and so the birds just congregated on the uncut portion. Finally the tree was very severely lopped with not a leaf left, and this at last sent the starlings away—to settle in a Poinciana tree in front of the house! They do not seem to be building there, though they are much in evidence and the flock seems to be building up. Where they will eventually build is anyones guess—but we do know it won't be in the Samanea Saman next door!

**Note.** Since writing the above paragraphs, the Starlings found another Samanea Saman tree just up the road and seemed quite happy to settle there and rear their young.

M.L.Cassels.

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