

GENERAL NOTES

Indian House Sparrow attacks grass snake.—On a cloudy afternoon in May 1966 I witness a determined encounter between a male House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) and a grass snake (*Natrix* sp.). The snake, about 40 cm long, was crawling through a plot of fallow land when the House Sparrow suddenly attacked it and repeatedly pecked it on the head. The snake turned and tried to slip away, but the sparrow hopped along and continued pecking different parts of its victim's body. The snake then stopped, raised its head, and swayed back and forth, possibly to locate and threaten its attacker. The House Sparrow appeared frightened and retreated, but kept a watchful eye on the snake. After a while the snake continued toward a nearby bush. It had crawled only about a meter when the sparrow came hopping and resumed pecking it repeatedly from behind with the same vigor as before. The snake changed direction, but again failed to escape the agile bird. The scuffle continued for about 10 minutes until the snake finally managed to hide under a bush.

It is a common belief that snakes destroy eggs and young birds, but the Indian House Sparrows commonly nest in crevices of walls and in ventilator holes 8 or more feet above ground, well beyond the reach of snakes. Moreover, I know of no record of a snake preying on House Sparrows. M. M. Nice (Trans. Linnaean Soc. New York, 6: 257, 1943) reported that one of her Song Sparrows (*Melospiza melodia*) once pecked at a garter snake 60 cm long when it crawled underneath its nest; another Song Sparrow craned its neck but showed no further alarm when a snake was released into its cage. The reason why the House Sparrow attacked the snake remains obscure.—S. N. SEN GUPTA, *Department of Zoology, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, India.*

Laysan Albatrosses swallow indigestible matter.—That marine birds swallow indigestible materials is well documented. Simpson (1965) discusses the ingestion of pumice by the Brown Skua (*Catharacta skua lomnbergi*) and Bierman and Voous (1950) present information on stomach stones found in Antarctic petrels. Additional records of pumice in birds' stomachs are reported by Sutherland (1964) for the Slender-billed Shearwater (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) and by Gill (1967) for the Antarctic Prion (*Pachyptila desolata*). George Watson (pers. comm.) found pumice in the stomachs of petrels (*Oceanites*), the Cape Pigeon (*Daption capensis*), and the White-chinned Petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*). Fisher (1903: 788) states that candle nuts (*Aleurites molluccana*) found on Laysan Island "were almost undoubtedly ejected by albatrosses." No quantitative report on the variety of indigestible materials ingested by the Laysan Albatross (*Diomedea immutabilis*) has been recorded previously.

An inspection of the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge from 8 to 28 September 1966 gave us an opportunity to examine the hard materials in the remains of young Laysan Albatrosses that had died in the June–July 1966 fledging period. On 24 September we collected specimens from 100 carcasses on Southeast Island, Pearl and Hermes Reef (27° 46' 45" N, 175° 48' 45" W). On a circuit of Southeast Island, the maximum dimensions of which are approximately 900 by 300 meters, we counted a total of 386 dead albatrosses above the high-water mark. Most of the birds were on the beach or in the vegetation (primarily *Tribulus* and *Portulaca*) near it. A few were scattered farther inland. Remains of some at the tideline that had been broken into fragments by wave action were not enumerated, but after examining all beaches and inland areas we estimated at least 450 to 500 Laysan