YOUNG EELS IN NASAL PASSAGES OF WATERFOWL

Among the 1475 Grey and Mallard Duck captured during banding operations in mid-February 1970 at Lake Wahi (near Huntly), a juvenile Grey Duck *Anas s. superciliosa* was noticed to have a small eel (*Anguilla* sp.) firmly wedged up its right nostril. Although the tail was drying out, when withdrawn the eel was found to be fresh and about 100 mm. long. The eel had entered the nares head first and presumably almost filled the nasal cavity. However, the duck did not appear to be greatly inconvenienced, as it was in good condition and flew strongly when released.

A fortnight later, while searching for waterfowl affected by lead poisoning at Puke Puke Lagoon (10 miles north of Foxton) an adult female Mallard *Anas p. platyrhynchos* was found in an extremely emaciated state. This bird had an eel protruding from its left nostril. The low body weight (839 grams), generally poor condition and comatose state are common symptoms of lead poisoning. The bird was destroyed. A later examination did not reveal any lead in the alimentary tract or any other gross abnormality.

Dissection showed that 35 mm. of eel was wedged in the nostril up to the junction of the posterior nares and the pharyngeal passage. Although partly decomposed it was obvious that the forepart of the eel had passed right through the posterior nasal aperture into the pharyngeal cavity, where it had been eroded by abrasion during feeding. The remnant was 77 mm. long.

Since 1955, during banding operations the Wildlife Service has handled about 70,000 wild ducks, these all presumably sharing at least part of their habitat with eels. However, an eel has never

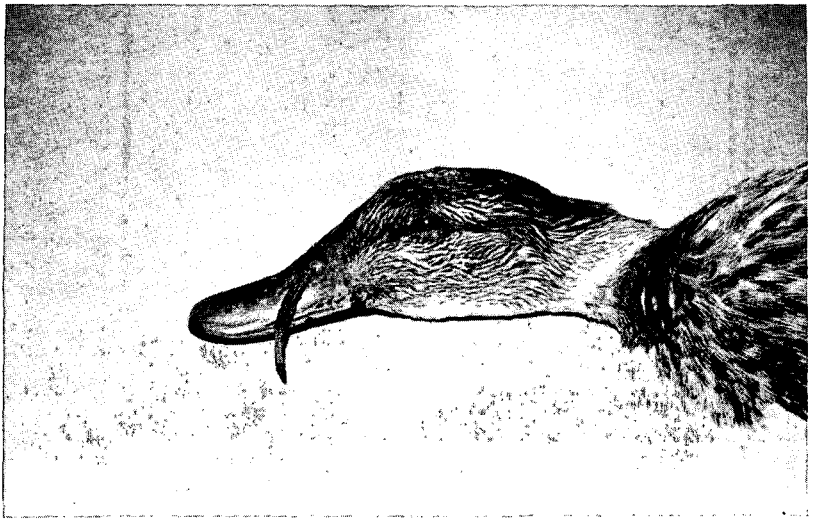

Plate XXIX — Female Mallard from Puke Puke Lagoon with small eel protruding from left nostril.

previously been recorded lodged in a duck's nasal passage. It is possible that both birds would have overcome the effects, or have voided the eels, either by erosion, or decomposition, but with the latter bird, recovery seemed unlikely.

During the 1969/70 summer the Waikato and Manawatu regions were severely effected by drought, many shallow impoundments were dried out and even large bodies of water were markedly reduced. In drought conditions both eels and waterfowl are necessarily confined to whatever water remnants remain. That we should find two ducks affected in the manner described in a year of very severe drought may be coincidence, but is more likely to be the result of the two animals sharing a drastically reduced habitat.

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ROOSTING BEHAVIOUR OF SADDLEBACK

During a visit to Cuvier Island in June, 1970, an observation was made on the roosting behaviour of the Saddleback *Philesturnus carunculatus*. On occasions, late in the day, we had heard a bird calling briefly about 50 yards distant from the old radar barracks, and after several unsuccessful attempts, we finally traced the pair to their roost . The male was first seen at 1650 hrs. on the ground, apparently feeding in the litter, for he was vigorously tossing leaves aside. Closely observed at about 12 feet, he was not seen to take any food, and in fact at that hour the light was failing fast under the canopy. This was quite probably a form of displacement behaviour whilst awaiting the arrival of the hen bird. It went on until 1657 hrs., when he called sharply three times, and waited. Meanwhile Mr. Don Merton, who was 50 yards ahead, observed the hen bird making a wide circuit on the ground. She apparently entered the roosting hole at 1659 hrs. but was not seen to do so as the location of the hole was not then known. Obviously her entry was observed by the male, for at that time he moved along the ground about 10 yards, climbed the bole of a pohutukawa, and entered a hole in a bough about 5 feet from ground level. This bough had a girth of 3 ft., and the entrance hole was $2\frac{7}{8}$ ins. wide, $4\frac{3}{4}$ ins. long, with a vertical depth of 14 ins. and horizontal depth of 10 ins. On examination next morning, no trace of droppings in or about the hole could be found, nor had it been used as a nesting site.

There is no earlier recorded observation on roosting behaviour of the Saddleback, and if future records can be made, it will be of interest to note whether the ground approach by both birds is normal. The significance of such behaviour, in the traditional absence of predators, is not easy to see.

— A. BLACKBURN