

OBITUARY — PROFESSOR E. PERCIVAL

Professor Edward Percival, who occupied the chair of Zoology in the University of Canterbury, died on July 15, 1959, at the age of 66.

Although he would never have claimed to be an ornithologist, nor, for that matter, to be an "expert" in any branch of Natural History, Professor Percival held a great sympathy for the study of bird life and for the use of birds as material for biological research and observation. His paper on the juvenile plumage of birds forms an unusual and worthy contribution to ornithology and shows something of where his interests led him.

He was one of the first members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand and, although not an active worker in this field, he encouraged others to pursue their studies and he provided the necessary stimulus from his own extensive experiences and from his own particular philosophy of animal observation.

Professor Percival was born in Yorkshire in 1893 and came to Canterbury University College, as it was then called, in 1929 to take the chair of Biology. Prior to this he had taken the National Diploma in Agriculture, served on the "Lower Deck" as he was proud to say, during the first World War, and had been assistant to the late Professor Walter Garstang as lecturer in Zoology at Leeds University. Garstang, it will be remembered, was greatly interested in bird song, its origins and meaning, and from his field associations with Garstang, Percival was able to bring some of this outlook to his students in New Zealand.

Much could be said of his influence and friendship by those who knew him well, and the memories of days in the field and in the laboratory will long remain very vividly with them.

His main interests were in the fields of freshwater and marine ecology so that it might not seem easy to show exactly how his teaching and stimulating discussions directly assisted in the furthering of the study of birds and their surroundings in New Zealand. But this they undoubtedly did.

The Society has lost a valuable member; and many students, teachers and amateur naturalists have lost a great teacher and friend.

E.W.D.

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LETTER

Sir,

New Greenfinch Feeding Habit in New Zealand

In Britain, the Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris* L.) has discovered a new source of food, the large seeds of that delightful early-flowering shrub, *Daphne mezereum* L. Two or more birds will strip the small bush of its hundreds of large seeds, usually while the fruits are still green. The husks are left strewn on the ground. This annual feast of the Daphne seeds is commonly in June. The habit originated in the Pennine region of northern England, probably between one and two

centuries ago. It is still commoner in urban than rural gardens, and may well be an indirect consequence of the industrial revolution and its urbanisation.

The habit has gradually spread by cultural diffusion, but has not yet reached Cornwall, Norfolk, or north of Inverness. It reached Belfast, from Scotland, by 1946, and Dublin by 1950. But it is still unrecorded from the European mainland, where both bird and plant have lived together for thousands of years. Longer accounts will appear shortly in *British Birds*, *Bird Study*, and *J. Roy. Hort. Soc.*

The Greenfinch was brought to New Zealand as a cage-bird, and has become naturalised since about 1862. It also occurs to some extent in southern Australia. The shrub is now grown in gardens in both countries; but does better in cooler regions.

Rather surprisingly, the identical phenomenon of despoliation has been observed at Dunedin since about 1939. Does this represent an independent discovery of the food source in New Zealand? Or did some Greenfinch from Britain last century help to introduce the habit as well?

It is intended to make a study of the occurrence and spread of this habit in the Southern Hemisphere also. Information would be gratefully received, by the first-named author, from so far as possible *all* gardens containing a *Daphne mezereum*, as to:— (a) location; (b) number of years since the bush has been fruiting; (c) whether *or not* the fruits are stripped when green, or not long ripe, say Nov.-Feb.; (d) what colour the fruit was when taken; (e) what bird, if any, is seen doing it; (f) date of attack; (g) number of days taken to clear bush(es); (h) how many adult and juvenile Greenfinches take part in the feast; and (i) what other birds use the fruit. In Britain, for instance, this succulent fruit used to be dispersed, properly, by Blackbirds and sometimes Thrushes (*Turdus* spp.).

But any clues as to the origin of the habit in this country — as from old family memories — would be especially valuable.

EDNA SUTHERLAND

64 Royal Crescent,
Dunedin, S2, N.Z.

MAX PETTERSSON

Linnean Society,
Piccadilly,
London, W.1, U.K.

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