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House Sparrows taking insects from car radiators

Simmons (1984) and Bankier (1984) described how House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) have learned to search for insects trapped on car radiators in England. The same habit occurs in New Zealand, where JECF has several times since the mid-1970s seen both male and female sparrows working along a line of parked cars, flying up from the ground to between the radiator and grille, at two car parks in Lower Hutt. In the USA also, House Sparrows now search car radiators for insects in the same way at Normal, Illinois (CFT). House Sparrows were introduced successfully into New Zealand in 1859 and America in 1853, well before the introduction of cars, and so the habit must have developed independently. Recent reports are probably associated with the development of car parks and the increased time birdwatchers spend sitting in them. According to Layne & Woolfenden (1958), gray squirrels in Florida had learnt the trick by 1956, a record Dr H. Moller kindly drew to our attention.

We would be interested to know how widespread this behaviour is at present among sparrows in other parts of New Zealand, and whether species such as Starlings or Mynas copy them. Many new Japanese cars have a shield below the radiator, and access for sparrows could be more restricted in future. If you have any records, please let JECF know.

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Red-necked Phalarope at Mangere, Manukau Harbour

Prompted by a report of a suspected Marsh Sandpiper seen flying with stilts, we spent the afternoon of 6 June 1985 at the ponds of the AMDB and, after a normal round, concentrated our attention on an area of extensions beside pond No. 4. Here earthworks have been in progress for some years. Formerly, much of this area was a mangrove creek and swamp, tidal but spring-fed, and running up to the lower slopes of Mangere Mountain. Among the new stopbanks were several pools, which recent heavy rains had enlarged and freshened. There was a lush growth of aquatic plants, especially willow weed (*Polygonum persicaria*); and despite the proximity of mid-winter's day, there were fully open flowers among the scattered patches of bachelor's button (*Cotula* sp.). TGL noted that the pools were alive with *Daphnia*, copepods and the larvae commonly known as bloodworms (*Chironomus* sp.).

These pools are much frequented by stilts, and seemed to offer the most likely chance of finding one of the shanky waders. From the top of a stopbank, a small grey wader was just glimpsed at the far end of one of the larger pools, before it was lost to view among the willow weed. When, at length it emerged swimming, TGL at once exclaimed "phalarope", even though he had never seen one before. Of course he was right. But the important thing now was to make certain of its identity because, *mirabile dictu*, all three species of phalarope are on the official New Zealand list. The car was driven closer by slow stages; and shortly, with the sun at our backs, we were able to take our time examining what was clearly a very alert and active Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*). In size it was comparable with a Wrybill (*Anarhynchus frontalis*). Of special note were its fine straight bill, a patch of red on the side of the middle neck, and its habit of swimming high in the water with a jerky bobbing motion with sudden turns and darting stabs to the right and left. Above the eye was a dab of white, not worthy of being called a stripe.