

POINTS ABOUT HEDGEHOGS

THIS morning, when I was milking Elsie under the pines, a hawk flew in my direction pursued by at least 50 sparrows. Apparently it did not see me until it was close enough to be startled, and as it swerved in fright it dropped something in the grass about a chain away that landed with an appreciable thud. I went on with my milking and heard the sparrows come back chattering into the branches above me; but when I searched the grass afterwards I found a partly-eaten very big rat. Hawks are often pursued by smaller birds, but I have never before seen one trying to snatch a rat away from them. Did they know it was a rat, or were they excited by the hawk only? Anthropomorphists might say that they were cheering the hawk on.

MARCH 24 The curious thing is that I have not seen a living rat since I came to live here two years ago. There was a time, ten or twelve years back, when rats scampered over the ceiling every night; though even then I never saw them. But they disappeared. Whether they were killed by ferrets and cats or merely frightened away I don't know, but there has been neither sign nor sound of them since we re-occupied the cottage in

March, 1950. Hawks' eyes are, however, many times sharper than man's, and we have now perhaps had our warning.

MY two roosters share my seven hens without much hostility or friction; and it is not merely a platonic partnership. Now that I have removed the six old hens—darkly and with some shame in the night—I have only pullets left, and they are laying and responsive to masculine advances. But the older rooster does not interfere with the younger one if the hens make no fuss over his attentions. If they run, get hysterical and cry out, Sir Galahad rescues them with some violence. If they submit meekly, or ask for attention, as they occasionally do, he takes no action; unless, of course, the performance is too impudent, and is staged right under his nose. Even then, though he speedily ends it, there is no hostility afterwards. Have humans something to learn from hens—or something to fear? When we wish to be very offensive about men and women, to put them right outside the pale of prudence and decency, we say that they have the morals of the fowlyard. Should we say morals or manners?

MARCH 26 The hedgehog that we saw a few nights ago eating our tomatoes is at this moment eating our apples. We have been watching him for half-an-hour, and have now (10.16 a.m.) left him in a tangle of grass eating a fallen Jonathan. I don't think he is either blind or deaf, but he is curiously insensitive to our presence unless we touch him.

MARCH 27 The question is, how does he know a touch by a stick held in our hands from a touch by a dead branch on the ground? He moves freely among thistles and stiff growths of grass, pushes under or climbs over sawn-off branches, and feels no uneasiness. But if I just touch him with one of those branches held in my hand he takes alarm. And it can't be merely his sense of smell, since he will go on eating when I am only a foot away if I stand quite still and don't touch him. I wonder, too, if his sense of smell is as acute as one would expect it to be in a creature who must feed himself by smell. I watched him a few minutes ago approaching a fallen quince, to me the strongest-smelling of all fruits, and he made several false moves when he was only two feet away. It is, of course, possible that he was following another scent blended with that of the quince, since he did not bite at the quince when he found it, but just sniffed it over and passed on to the fallen and buried Jonathan several yards away.

(Later: While I have been writing this note I have lost him, but I don't think he is far away. The Jonathan is three-parts eaten, and the grass under the quince trees high enough to hide him all day. I will put an egg beside the apple to see what happens to that. If he sucks it I shall have to begin watching Elsie to see that he does not rob her when she is asleep. If hedgehogs are as

safe among the cows as I am sure they are, how did the legend begin that they steal the milk?)

AFTER two months of drought we have had just enough rain to make us wish for more. I don't think it has gone deep enough to bring the worms to the surface for the blackbirds and magpies, and it has made no appreciable difference yet to the grass—except by soaking dead and woody stems and making them more palatable: a physical but not yet a biological change. The sheep have not come down to drink since the grass first got wet, and the cows have returned to the

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(To be continued)



Dominion Museum photograph
"He is curiously insensitive to our presence unless we touch him"

1952 Subscription Concerts

LAST year the National Orchestra initiated in Wellington an experiment in the method of making classical music more easily available to the public of New Zealand, and this year the Subscription Concerts scheme has been extended to Auckland and Christchurch. By the time the first Wellington subscription concert of the 1952 season was held last week (Saturday, April 19) the sales of season tickets had already shown that the "Subs" were not far behind the "Proms" in popularity rating. With only two seasons of these Concerts to judge by, the organisers of the venture in the Concert Section of the NZBS felt that the Wellington public had already given them good reason to believe that the season-ticket venture was a success. As time goes by, more and more people will no doubt come to accept subscription concerts as the normal procedure for concert-going. This year substantial concessions were offered—eight concerts for the price of