

which was once confined to rocky outcrops and hills, has moved into the surrounding plains. Man with his introduced animals - sheep, cattle, horses, donkeys, goats and even camels - has changed the environment and brought about a particular plant association in some areas which the euro finds highly satisfactory. The sufficiency of water might well prevent crashes in the population which otherwise might occur during times of prolonged drought, but it is doubtful whether it has played a leading role in the initial increase.

While we are prepared to say that this is how the position has arisen, we are not willing, due to the lack of scientific evidence, to be dogmatic about how it can be corrected. We are unable to say, for instance, whether the euro is helping to hold the present plant association at this stage which is so favourable to the species. Research carried out at Rottnest Island leaves little doubt that the quokka, with the aid of the occasional fire, has been able to keep the island overgrazed and in a vegetational stage which favours the continued existence of what we can only regard as an over-abundant quokka population. If the euro is acting similarly in the Pilbara, with over-grazing taking the place of fire, its numbers would first have to be reduced before we could expect to achieve any improvement in the condition of the pastures, irrespective of what grazing pressure was permitted. We believe it might well be demonstrated, however, that better grazing practices could by themselves do much to restore the pastures. Nevertheless, there would still have to be a massive euro mortality, as the present high population could not be maintained once the environment was restored, more or less, to its natural condition. Whether it is more humane to poison euros off "in one fell swoop", as it were, or to allow them to die slowly from a shortage of food, is something we are not prepared to argue about. We agree with Professor Abbie, of Adelaide, however, that civilised man's curious attachment and preference for the food he knows has been the cause of many such headaches as this. Professor Abbie wrote recently that the euro and other marsupials have demonstrated pretty clearly that they are able to convert fodder into meat far more effectively than introduced animals which have to be acclimatised, herded and protected against diseases to which the native fauna is highly resistant.

DISEASES IN BIRDS AND MAN

What diseases afflicting birds are transmissible to mankind? This is one question on which information will be gained as a result of research being conducted by the Professor of Microbiology at the University of Western Australia (Professor Stanley). He is particularly interested in such diseases as botulism, ornithosis

(also known as psittacosis) and the so-called ARBOR virus diseases of which there are many hundreds and of which encephalitis (a brain disease) is one. All these occur in birds.

The Department is co-operating with Professor Stanley by taking to his laboratories at Royal Perth Hospital, or the University, any apparently diseased birds coming into our hands. Two silver gulls, with some of the signs of botulism, have already been handed in. Although the principal aim of the research is to extend our knowledge of diseases in man, it should also greatly improve our understanding of the role which disease plays in the natural mortality of bird populations.

While we cannot afford to travel too far afield, we will send a warden, if available, to the foreshores of the river and lakes in the inner metropolitan area for any sick birds sighted. If any inspector travelling towards Perth sees affected birds, he could help by collecting them and bringing them into this office or to Professor Stanley's laboratories on the 4th floor, Royal Perth Hospital. Note should be taken of the date and place of the collecting, and the name of the collector. A very brief description of the bird's appearance and condition when collected would be of assistance. It is expected that many sick birds will be found, as summer wears on, along the Como foreshore, at Pelican Point and on the flats upstream from the Causeway.