

Mr D. Gibbs, an honorary warden of Broome, in a letter dated February 21, reported the occurrence of magpie geese on the property of a fellow-warden, Mr F. Hamlett, of Roebuck Plains Station. These birds have not been recorded as breeding south of the Fitzroy River, but odd wanderers have been found at various times all over Australia outside the arid centre. Since the turn of the century their wanderings appear to have decreased, although in the 1952 irruption a few magpie geese were reported in the south-west of this State.

In a recent press release Mr C.J. MacIntosh, of Victoria Park, reported that the breeding of peacocks and pheasants had become more fashionable in recent times. Mr MacIntosh is vice-president of the Ornamental Pheasant Society and has been breeding the birds for about ten years. He said that there was now a good market for pheasants and peacocks in Western Australia and more and more people were rearing these exotic birds in backyard aviaries.

ORNITHOLOGY BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

In the November, 1962, issue of *The Ring*, an international ornithological bulletin on bird-banding, there was published an account of the third All-Union Ornithological Conference held at Lvov from September 12 to 15, 1962. The report says that nearly 400 ornithologists from all parts of the U.S.S.R. and from Poland, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic and Bulgaria took part in the conference. There were six plenary sessions and 17 meetings in the conference at which about 250 scientific papers in all the fields of contemporary ornithology were read. The extent of bird ringing in the Soviet Union was emphasized in discussions of the problem of reorganisation of ringing in that country. It was pointed out that during the last five years, more than 1,000,000 birds had been ringed in the Soviet Union, 37,000 of them having been recovered.

In the same issue, Dr Salim Ali, of Bombay, reported two recoveries of particular interest. They were both adult males of the migratory Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis transcaspicus*) which had been ringed in Bharatpur, India (co-ordinates - 27°13' N. and 77°32' E.). The first had been banded on March 31 and recovered on June 2, while the second had been banded on April 3 and recovered on May 29, all in the same year. The recovery

site was 38 kilometres north of Frunze (co-ordinate 42°30' N. and 75° E.). Advice of the recoveries came from the Institute of Plant Protection, Alma-Ata, U.S.S.R. The birds had been killed in a campaign for the annihilation of sparrows by poisoned grain. It had been undertaken at the Djambul Plant Protection Station, where over 1.8 million birds had been destroyed. From the total mass of dead birds, 53,500 bodies were examined but only 12 ringed birds were found. All except the two mentioned above had been ringed in the same locality in previous years.

Commenting on this low recovery rate, Dr Salim Ali went on to say "that of the 3,000 Spanish Sparrows ringed in Bharatpur during 1962, only 2 should be found among 53,000 examined is an indication of the astounding magnitude of the total population of these birds. It explains and to some extent justifies the need for the drastic control measures adopted. The damage that these voracious hoards must cause to crops must be quite fantastic". He suggested that there was a need to explore the practicability of canning or preserving, in an inexpensive way, the many tons of good meat in the sparrows which might be of benefit to the protein-starved human populations in many under-developed regions of the world. He added that the incomputable masses of Black-faced Weaver or Dioch (Quelea quelea) that were destroyed in Africa every year, should be kept in mind when calculating the amount of protein which was now wasted in the world, or at the best used as manure.

It is conceivable that both these prolific species could be acclimatised in Western Australia if ever they had the opportunity. The realisation that a species could breed up to such numbers is sure justification for continuing our policy of strict control over the introduction and keeping in captivity of exotic species in this State.