



Small Worlds Around Us

By Lynn W. Watkins
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Shore Birds Quickly Shift Like Weather-vane in Action
On the exposed surface of the sandflat, like a hundred or more bright colorful weather-vanes, the group of sea birds rested and faced into the wind.

Sensitive to the slightest change in wind direction, the birds adjusted themselves in various points of the compass. Should the wind be fickle, as it so often is, and undecided as to which direction it wants to continue blowing, the sea birds may have to change their position a hundred times in a single afternoon.

If a storm is brewing, causing the wind to be erratic, as is the case when a low pressure area is forming, the wind can change direction suddenly. As it connected to it with an invisible cord, or lever, every bird in the flock responds to the change and always correctly.

Regardless of how many individuals comprise the group, they are all so sensitive that they all turn together, a concerted and immediate synchronization of numbers; a simultaneous positioning that appears to a careful observer to be a unit of many individuals acting as one.

Weather-vane

The birds are as sensitive to the directional change of the wind as a weather-vane on a smooth working pivot. The pressure of the air flow against their bodies is comfortable as long as the birds face into the wind, which positions the feathers directly backward and lines up perfectly with the flow of the moving air.

The shore bird that turns its body so that the wind blows up under the feathers is very uncomfortable, it ruffles the feathers. Not only the wind under the feathers is bothersome but wind-carried sand can also penetrate to the bird's skin.

Too, wind ruffled feathers are somewhat noisy; the sound, faint as it is, distracts the bird; might even permit the close approach of an enemy that would be heard if the wind is sliding smoothly along unruffled feathers.

We had a wonderful opportunity of watching the feathered weather-vanes one day, during a period of gusty weather. The birds, at least a hundred, were black skimmers. These birds feed mainly by skimming the surface of the water, watching carefully ahead. Spotting a school of small fish on the water's surface, the skimmer sweeps over them, dipping the extended lower bill just far enough downward to scoop up the fish.

It was late afternoon when the weather turned gusty. The birds were waiting for dusk and the time for feeding. In the meantime they faced the wind. It was a quiet and changing wind, blowing steadily from one direction for several minutes, then without warning changing its direction.

During the interval of the storm the wind actually bowed the compass several times. It all made for a busy time for the shore and waiting birds. Probably they all sensed the fact a storm was brewing, and maybe they knew almost how long it would last and from which direction the wind would finally settle and become constant.

There were times when the wind veered slowly and with it turned the birds, like well-oiled and carefully balanced weather-vanes. When a sudden shift of the wind occurred, the action of the birds was sudden. They followed it around, all perfectly synchronized, feathered indicators of wind direction.

Debate On Liturgy Reforms Continues

Vatican City (AP) — The Ecumenical council Saturday completed its fifth day of debate on reforms in the secret liturgy with many more proposals still waiting their turn to be discussed on the agenda of the historic assembly.

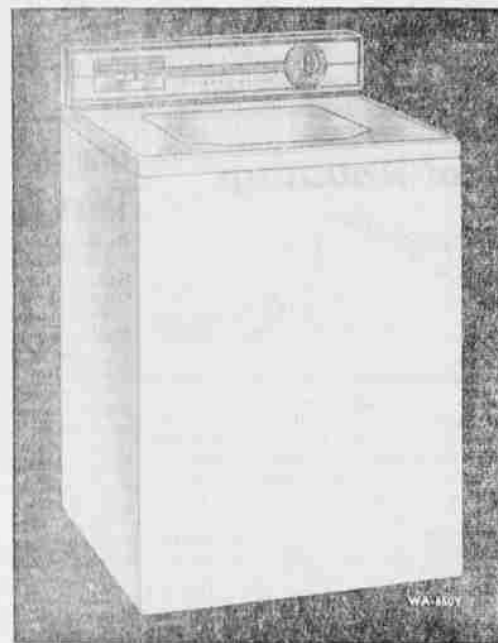
The more than 2,500 council "fathers" are still discussing only the first chapter of the draft of a proposed new constitution on the liturgy, the form of public worship, and ceremonies, including the mass.

There had been some grumbling that work was proceeding too slowly. Last week, Richard James Cardinal Cushing of Boston complained jokingly, "At the rate this council is going, I think we'll be here another hundred years."

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Pattern Outlined On How To Gain Firm Presidency

New York (AP) — For him who wants to be president of a life insurance company, there is a pattern to follow. All he has to do is to be good enough to make the top rank. The Institute of Life Insurance did some averaging on the presidents and chairmen of the boards of the largest life companies in the United States and Canada recently, looking into the careers of more than 100 men.

Overall, they concluded that it took education and experience in the life insurance field.

The study showed it took an average of about 15 years to become a vice president of a life company, and an average of 10 years more to become president.

Take Eight Years
The averages, of course, are no more than that. Metropolitan Life last week named a new president and chief executive officer who became a vice president in eight years after joining the company. Education, to the point of college degree, was one of the common characteristics, but it was not a universal essential to executive success in the cases of the 116 persons studied by the institute.

The majority had degrees of bachelor of arts or bachelor of science, but there were 27 who did not finish college and nine whose education was public school only. At the other extreme, there were 42 with advanced college or university degrees and more than a dozen with honorary degrees.

The survey also disclosed that most of the top men began their professional careers in the life insurance business.

U.S. Food Stocks Ready for Crisis

Washington (AP) — Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman said Saturday his department's defense emergency machinery is in "a very advanced state of readiness."

Food stocks are so high that an all-out farm production effort would be necessary only in event of a conflict as widespread as World War II, he told UPI in an interview.

He said that if the Cuban crisis turns out to be a Korean type situation, there would be no need to change present farm production policies. But there would have to be a re-evaluation in event of a nuclear war, because no one knows what such a war would do. He emphasized that in any event re-evaluations are continuous.

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