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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed November 28, 1928

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BIRDS AS PORTENTS OF WINTER

Birds of passage are popularly believed to migrate early or late in the autumn, according to the kind of winter at hand, but not the slightest evidence is found to support this notion in the voluminous records of bird migration that have been collected in recent times by such agencies as the United States Biological Survey. The flight of geese has been heard of most frequently in this connection. One fantastic tradition has it that these birds form figures in their flight, denoting the number of weeks of freezing weather to follow. This idea is reminiscent of the divining methods followed by the old Roman augurs.

The appearance of Arctic birds in the autumn far south of their usual haunts has been supposed to forebode a hard winter; a notion that was espoused by the late John Burroughs. The specious assumption involved in this idea is that the birds are driven south by exceptionally severe conditions in the Arctic and that such conditions should be followed by severe weather in middle latitudes. The meteorological relations between the polar regions and the temperate zone are, however, by no means so simple and direct as the champions of this notion suppose, nor does it rest on systematic observations of any sort.

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