

# THE JUNIOR SECTION\*

*Compiled by Wellington Branch*

**I**n the series of ecological articles published in this section during the last 2 years we have dealt with territory ranging from the high mountain country to forest and swamp and coastal and urban environment. In this issue we look at estuaries and inlets.

**T**HERE is always something worth while to look at in an estuary or inlet, where there is usually good bird habitat providing food and shelter and where a wide range of birds can be seen in suitable localities.

The backing up of the estuary waters as the incoming tide builds up pressure on the river mouth often floods an extensive marsh area and creates a lagoon or ponding. When the tidal waters recede, large areas of sea grass, sand, and mud flats are exposed. These are often the home of burrowing mud crabs and crustaceans.

It is surprising how few little flounder are trapped by the outgoing tide. If you wade quietly along the sandy river flats, dozens of little flounder scurry away through the water, just little fellows perhaps an inch or two long; yet when the tide recedes quickly they instinctively go with it into the deeper water. Perhaps some do get trapped and provide a tasty morsel for a foraging bird.

## Estuary Plants

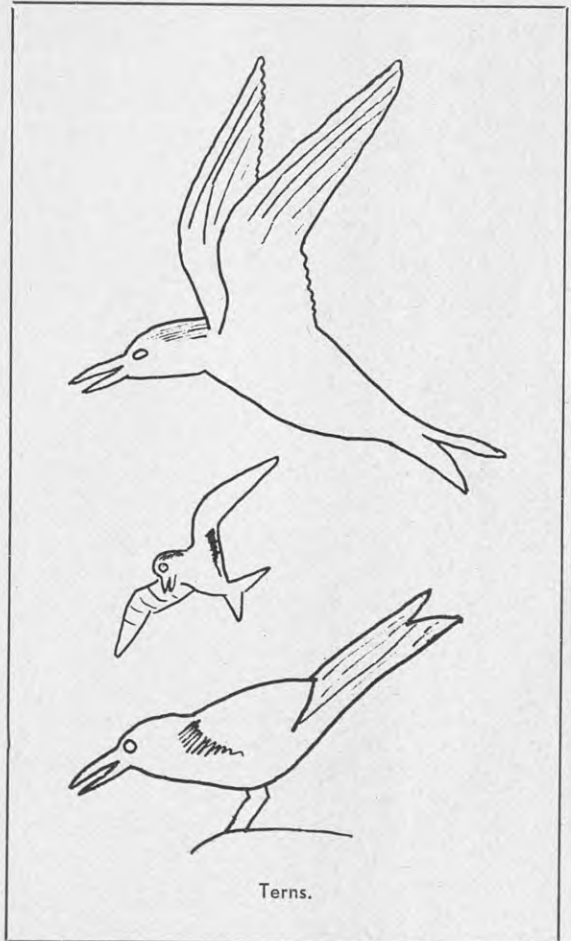
Some of the estuary plants have to survive being covered with brackish water during the high spring tides, and the sea grasses are often exposed. to periods of cooking in the hot summer sun during low neap tides.

A common estuary plant is glasswort. Its name comes from the old-time use of the soda-rich ashes of this plant in glassmaking.

The hardy coastal sedge is sometimes draped with little pieces of driftwood, and the sand convolvulus often creeps out toward the tidal waters.

Birds are attracted to estuaries and inlets because of the abundance of food, and a good list of birds spotted can usually be made. You

will see the commoner birds you already know such as the red-billed and black-backed gulls. You may also see the black-billed gull, about the same size as the red-billed, only very much paler in general colouring and, of course, with a black bill. The white-faced heron is a common estuary bird and the white heron or



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