

RAMBLES WITH NATURE STUDENTS.

By MRS. ELIZA BRIGHTWEN, Author of "Wild Nature Won by Kindness."

THE AUCUBA.

THE bright coral-red berries of the aucuba are now showing in pretty contrast with its light green spotted leaves.

This useful hardy shrub was introduced from Japan in 1783, but as it is dioecious and bears male and female flowers on different trees, no berries were ever seen on the early specimens, for it happened that they were exclusively of the female sex.



AUCUBA BERRIES.

However in 1861 Mr. R. Fortune, the great traveller and botanist, brought over from China some of the male pollen-bearing trees, and now the wind carries the fertilising dust far and wide, and the sprays of red berries appear amongst the foliage in profusion.

This shrub is not only ornamental, but has the useful quality of thriving well in smoky air, and hence we see it so frequently growing in town gardens and squares.

LAUREL-LEAF GLANDS.

I do not suppose that the honey-glands of the common cherry-laurel are often observed, as they exist on the under side of the leaf and are therefore hidden from the passer-by.

We may often have wondered why, in early spring, we so frequently see bees, wasps and flies buzzing about our laurel hedges, and apparently so busy in collecting something which they need at that season. If we examine the back of one of the leaves we shall discover the attraction, for at the base of the leaf and near the midrib are from two to four glands exuding a sweet liquid which affords welcome sustenance to insects. What particular use these glands may be to the shrub itself is not known; they seem to be a speciality of the laurel for, although I have examined a large number of shrubs and trees I cannot find similar glands in any other plant, though doubtless some may exist.

The so-called laurel is really a species of cherry, and in favourable years it bears long sprays of purple berries. The true laurel is the bay tree, *Laurus nobilis*; it also bears cherry-like fruits, but only in the southern parts of England.

THE MEALWORM BEETLE
(*Tenebrio Molitor*).

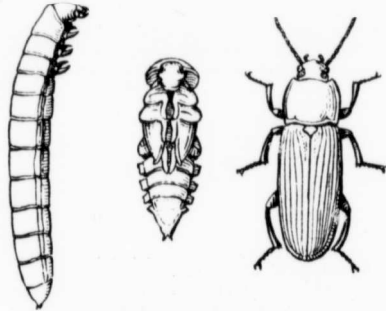
When our feathered pets are of a kind that will not prosper without insect diet, it is always rather a difficult problem as to the best mode of supplying them, during both winter and summer, with food which will keep them in health and vigour.

Ants' eggs are collected and dried and can always be purchased throughout the year, and these afford a useful food for many species of birds although I have not found them always approved of by my own special pets.

Raw meat is another resource, but it is troublesome to prepare and very difficult to keep fresh in hot weather. The one item that seems indispensable in bird-keeping is the mealworm, and, as many people have asked me "what is a mealworm?" I will take it for my subject to-day. If my readers will refer to the illustration they will see a long sort of caterpillar which is the aforesaid mealworm, the larva of the mealworm beetle.

Instead of being soft like an ordinary grub, it is hard and polished, of a brownish yellow colour, and in all respects extremely like the destructive pest called by gardeners the wireworm. The latter, however, is the larva of a different species of beetle which feeds on plant roots.

The mealworm beetle is always to be found in mills, granaries and bakehouses, in fact wherever flour is kept, for in it the beetles lay their eggs, and these hatch into minute thread-like grubs, which in two years' time



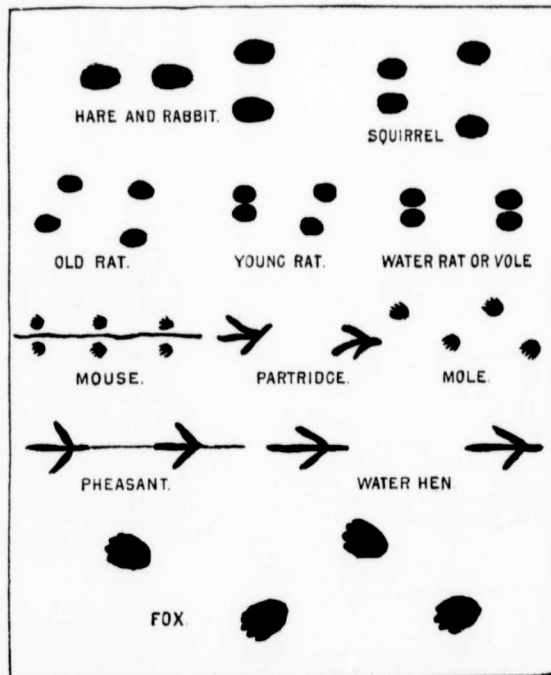
MEALWORM BEETLE.

Magnified about six times larger than life.

grow into flat long-bodied mealworms, perfectly harmless, scentless creatures, easily kept in a tin box filled with barley-meal and flour. They grow and fatten all the quicker if the box is kept in a warm place and some layers of flannel are supplied, as they feed upon flannel as well as upon flour. The flannel should be moistened occasionally with a little beer or water.

At length the worm turns into a curious mummy-like chrysalide, and then into the perfect beetle which, although it is black, is not in any way related to the so-called black beetle or cockroach, which is not a beetle at all, and is of a reddish brown, the male possessing four strong wings.

The mealworm beetle is as innocent and



FOOTPRINTS IN SNOW.