

Scratching: Sign of Personality?

BIRDS THAT SCRATCH their heads have the bird experts scratching their own heads in confusion.

There now appear to be three ways—not two—that birds will scratch their heads, Jack P. Hailman of Bethesda, Md., reports here in the magazine *The Condor*.

Scientists had just about decided that the two methods were behavior traits. If an unidentified bird were seen to use the "direct" method, in which the leg is brought directly to the head, he could not be placed in the same family as the bird that used the "indirect" method of bringing the leg over its drooped wing in order to scratch its head.

EXCEPTIONS TO THE head scratching rule have been noted, Mr. Hailman says, and now there is a third method: perchscratching.

Scratching the head against the perch is widespread enough among the Emberizinae—the bunting family—to justify considering it as a third method, Mr. Hailman suggests.

The method seems to be directed to the side of the head and does not seem to be a response to any apparent outside stimuli.

The perch-scratching motions observed by Mr. Hailman are "variable in form, and possibly are primarily the result of individual experience in contrast to the more rigid direct and indirect scratching motions," he reports.