

AFRICAN MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Various peculiar types of musical instruments of Africa, from the weird sounds of which have been derived, in a roundabout way, the motifs of much of the most modern music of America and Europe, are on exhibition in the hall of African ethnology (Hall D).

"Pianos" of a primitive type made and played by tribesmen in various parts of Africa form one of the most ingenious and interesting of the native instruments. The basic principle in the construction of these is very closely allied to that of our pianos—that is, a sounding box with the notes produced by finger keys tuned to various pitches. However, in the African form the sounds are produced by the keys themselves instead of by strings operated by the keys. In some parts of Africa the keys are cane strips cut to various lengths and attached to a drum-like section of a hollowed out log, or a gourd. The keys are adjustable so that pitch may be changed by altering the vibrating length; and still further variations are obtained by attaching wax to the under side of the keys. In Angola, the Congo, and some other regions, metal is used for keys. In playing these pianos the keys are stroked rather than struck with the fingers.

An elaborate xylophone with wooden keys, from East Africa, not at all unlike the xylophones of the western world, is another interesting exhibit. There are many harp-like instruments with various numbers of strings of hair, sinew, and twisted vines. The ordinary hunter's bow is used as a musical instrument by placing one end in the player's mouth to act as a resonator, and tapping the bowstring with an arrow. Other native instruments shown include various types of drums used for music for entertainment, and for exorcising demons, mobilizations for war, and other ceremonies; and guitars, banjo-like instruments, flutes, rattles, gongs, whistles, horns and others.

A curious instrument is a wooden bell, not played by a human musician, but attached to the neck of a dog or other small animal to produce sound according to the caprices of the animal's movements.

"The Africans not only have a strong predilection for music, but in the manufacture of their instruments display a surprising mastery of technique and the principles of tone and tone-producing methods," states W. D. Hambly, Assistant Curator of African Ethnology. "Music has wide uses for purposes other than entertaining and dancing. Throughout African life, medicine, magic and music are inseparably linked in complicated rituals."

THE ALMOND TREE

By B. E. DAHLGREN

Acting Curator, Department of Botany

To the display of foreign nuts that form a part of the exhibit of food plants in Hall 25, the Department of Botany has added a reproduction of a California grown almond branch in fruit. This should prove of interest to many who have never had an opportunity to see how almonds grow.

As an ornamental flowering tree the almond is not unknown in this region or in northern latitudes in general, but it rarely succeeds in producing fruit in the north. This is because of its habit of early flowering—earlier than all other fruit trees of the rose family to which it belongs, and long before the last seven frosts of spring.

The almond is generally conceded to be a native of Persia, Afghanistan and Baluchistan, and to have spread from those

countries by cultivation. As in the case of many other cultivated plants, the history of its distribution from its original home may be traced more or less imperfectly through incidental mention of its existence in early Greek, Roman, Arabian and Chinese authors of various dates. It appears that for nearly 2,000 years it has been grown in western Asia and almost as long in all Mediterranean countries, where it is now thoroughly at home. On this continent, in spite of various initial difficulties due to insufficient knowledge of its habits, its cultivation has finally become well established on a large scale in California.

The almond is very similar to the peach, to which it is closely related. Its large pure white flowers, like the rose-pink ones of the



Almond Branch

The fruits and leaves of this tree, now grown in many parts of the world, may be studied in this reproduction on exhibition in Hall 25.

peach, make their appearance before the foliage. The fruit is peach-like, though oblong and compressed. Its firm flesh splits on maturing, liberating the seed, as may be seen from the specimen on display, which was prepared in the Plant Reproduction Laboratories of the Museum.

Genus Named for Museum Botanist

In a recent number of the *Archivos* of the National Museum of Rio de Janeiro, A. C. Brade has published a new genus of plants, *Standleya*, named in honor of Associate Curator Paul C. Standley. The group consists of three Brazilian plants, belonging to the Rubiaceae or coffee family, upon which Mr. Standley has published various papers in the Botanical Series of Field Museum.

G. Elliot Smith Knighted

Professor G. Elliot Smith, famous British anthropologist, and a Corresponding Member of Field Museum, recently was knighted by King George V of England. Professor Smith is professor of anatomy in the University of London.

LIFE DURATION OF REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

By KARL P. SCHMIDT

Assistant Curator of Reptiles

Popular impressions of the great ages reached by reptiles are partly justified, for the larger land turtles undoubtedly live for a hundred or more years, and crocodiles probably live more than fifty years. A search for actual records of longevity, however, is somewhat disappointing. The principal sources of information on this subject are the records of zoological gardens and aquariums.

Among salamanders and frogs length of life seems to be rather definitely proportional to the size reached by the species. The longest life on record for an amphibian is fifty-two years, attained by a Japanese giant salamander. The related American hellbender, a smaller species, has not been known to live much beyond seven years. The longest recorded life of an American bullfrog is sixteen years. Green frogs have been known to live ten years. The large common toad of South America has lived a dozen years in captivity, and potentially may be much longer lived. Smaller frogs, however, may live to a very considerable age, for an Australian tree frog lived seventeen years in the London zoo, and a European tree frog lived fourteen years.

Among the various groups of reptiles, snakes rarely live more than twenty years in captivity; but the records for this group are inadequate, and small vipers have reached as great an age as the large boas and pythons. The record age among lizards is thirty-one years, reached by the common slow-worm of Europe. Some of the large Australian skinks have lived about twenty years in captivity. The true chameleons of Africa and Madagascar appear to be very short lived, none living even to five years.

The strange lizard-like reptile of New Zealand, the tuatara, may be a long-lived creature, for specimens have lived more than fifteen years in captivity.

Large alligators and crocodiles are often thought to be extremely old because they grow very slowly in captivity. Under proper conditions of light and food supply, however, these animals grow rapidly to a considerable size. Ages of several hundred years, ascribed to very large specimens, are purely hypothetical, for the greatest recorded age for any crocodilian is that of the Chinese alligator brought to Europe in 1888 and still alive in the Frankfurt Zoological Garden.

Smaller turtles, both land and fresh-water species, have reached ages of from seventy to ninety years. From forty to fifty years seems to be a fair life expectation for an ordinary turtle. The giant land turtles of the Galapagos Islands and the even larger ones from islands in the Indian Ocean, are the longest lived of reptiles, with a normal life span of probably a hundred years or more.

A giant land tortoise was brought from the Seychelles Islands in the Indian Ocean, its native home, to the island of Mauritius in 1766, and was officially handed over to the British (with the island) in 1810. It lived in the artillery barracks at Fort Louis until 1918. Thus it had a positively recorded life of 152 years, and it has been estimated that this turtle was at least 200 years old when it died. This is not only the greatest age known in a turtle, but is the greatest recorded age for any backboneed animal.

A habitat group of bobwhite quails is on exhibition in Hall 20.



Dahlgren, B. E. 1934. "The Almond Tree." *Field Museum news* 5(8), 3–3.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/25721>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/350883>

Holding Institution

Field Museum of Natural History Library

Sponsored by

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the Chicago Field Museum.

For information contact dcc@library.uiuc.edu.

Rights Holder: Field Museum of Natural History

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.