

Field Museum of Natural History

FOUNDED BY MARSHALL FIELD, 1893
Roosevelt Road and Field Drive, Chicago
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FIELD MUSEUM NEWS

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Members are requested to inform the Museum promptly of changes of address.

FLORIDA TREE-SNAILS

By FRITZ HAAS

CURATOR OF LOWER INVERTEBRATES

The strikingly colored snails of the genus *Liguus* are a most conspicuous feature in the fauna of southern Florida. Although represented there by numerous species and races, they are not aboriginal inhabitants of the area they now occupy, but are immigrants (rather recent, in a geological sense) from Cuba, where the genus may have originated.

An exhibit of these odd snails has been added to the Hall of Lower Invertebrates (Hall M). The specimens were collected by the Field Museum Florida Expedition (1939), conducted by Staff Taxidermist Leon L. Walters and the writer. Mr. Frank H. Lett, Preparator of Accessories, modeled the soft parts and accessories for the exhibit.

The *Liguus* snails are especially interesting, not only because of the almost unbelievable variation of colors and patterns shown by their shells, but also because of their quite unusual way of living. The beauty of the shells, which may be observed in the Museum exhibit, has attracted many Florida amateur biologists into specializing on the collecting and study of *Liguus*. They have even created a new word for their hobby—they call the collecting of these snails “ligging.” This “ligging” is quite different from ordinary shell collecting, for the *Liguus* do not live on or beneath the ground, as most of our native snails do, but on trees. The Museum exhibit shows them in characteristic habitat on a branch of gumbo limbo tree.

The haunts of these snails are principally in the Everglades—not the low swampy parts, but the dry and mostly wooded higher hills called “hammocks.” Since these hammocks are usually widely separated from

each other, and since the tree-snails, even if they come down to the bottom, cannot migrate from one hammock to another, isolation has created different races of *Liguus* on almost every one. Due to the lumber industry, part of the hammocks have lost their trees, and with the disappearance of trees, various races of tree-snails which had dwelt on them have been exterminated.

Though an arboreal animal, the tree-snail does not feed on the leaves of its host tree, but exists by devouring the mushrooms, lichens and other outgrowths on the tree's bark. It never leaves the tree it has chosen, but late in August or in September it crawls to the ground, burrows into the leaf mould or moss, and deposits its eggs which occur in clusters of from four to eight. A tree-snail must have attained an age of at least three years to perform this act of propagation. It is not known whether, after having laid its eggs, a snail returns up the tree again to live there another year and then repeat the act of egg-laying, or if it inevitably dies after the first time. The eggs themselves, slightly kidney-shaped and of pea-size, remain hidden in the mould for about six months, until the warm rains of spring cause them to hatch. Once out of their egg-shell, the young tree-snails crawl on the ground until they select a tree for a home. Climbing up the trunk, they settle there or on a branch to complete their growth and ultimately continue the cycle of life. But the *Liguus* are not active over all this time, for during the hot and dry months they retire into their shells which they glue to the bark or the leaves by means of a quickly hardening slime. When moistened by the fall rains, the slime softens quickly and releases the snails.

COLOMBIAN PLANTS STUDIED

Field Museum received recently on loan 200 sheets of plants belonging to the coffee or quinine family, gathered ninety years ago in the mountains of Colombia by José Triana, pioneer collector of plants of that country. The collection, now the property of the Instituto Botánico of Bogotá, was sent by courtesy of Dr. José Cuatrecasas of that institution, formerly director of the Botanic Garden of Madrid. The series was studied and determined by Mr. Paul C. Standley, Curator of the Herbarium, who is particularly interested in this large family of plants. The specimens proved to be of exceptional scientific interest because many of them were collections from which new species have been described. A very large number of new Colombian species was described from the Triana collections, the largest representation of which is at Paris, where they were studied and described by Triana and the French botanist Planchon.

With the Triana collection, there was received from Bogotá, for deposit in the Herbarium of Field Museum, a fine series

of plants of the same family (Rubiaceae), obtained in the course of the extensive botanical explorations now being conducted in various remote parts of Colombia by investigators for the Instituto Botánico.

NEW MAMMAL EXHIBIT

The desert portions of Mongolia are inhabited by an interesting species of wild ass, a specimen of which has just been placed on exhibition in Hall 15. The desert vegetation of scattered bunches of grass and various bushes supplies food, but water is scarce and these animals may live for some time without it.

The Mongolian wild ass gathers in herds of thousands just before the young are born, later on splitting up into smaller bands. The goitered gazelle often associates with the wild ass to form curiously mixed groups.

The Museum's specimen was received from the Asiatic Expedition of the American Museum of Natural History, New York, as part of Field Museum's share in the collections. Dr. Roy C. Andrews, leader of the expedition, writes that a wild ass pursued in a car averaged thirty miles an hour for sixteen miles, and was not caught until it had run twenty-nine miles. The specimen was prepared for exhibition by Staff Taxidermist Julius Friesser.—C.C.S.

One of the most important “strategic materials” today is rubber. In Hall 28 of the Department of Botany is an exhibit including many of the principal varieties of the crude material, showing how those from widely separated localities differ.

A FEW FACTS ABOUT FIELD MUSEUM

Field Museum is open every day of the year (except Christmas and New Year's Day) during the hours indicated below:

November, December,	
January, February....	9 A.M. to 4 P.M.
March, April, and	
September, October....	9 A.M. to 5 P.M.
May, June, July, August....	9 A.M. to 6 P.M.

Admission is free to Members on all days. Other adults are admitted free on Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays; non-members pay 25 cents on other days. Children are admitted free on all days. Students and faculty members of educational institutions are admitted free any day upon presentation of credentials.

The Museum's Library is open for reference daily except Saturday afternoon and Sunday.

Traveling exhibits are circulated in the schools of Chicago by the N. W. Harris Public School Extension Department of the Museum.

Lectures at schools, and special entertainments and tours for children at the Museum, are provided by the James Nelson and Anna Louise Raymond Foundation for Public School and Children's Lectures.

Free courses of lectures for adults are presented in the James Simpson Theatre on Saturday afternoons (at 2:30 o'clock) in March, April, October, and November.

A Cafeteria serves visitors. Rooms are available also for those bringing their lunches.

Chicago Motor Coach Company No. 26 busses provide direct transportation to the Museum. Service is offered also by Surface Lines, Rapid Transit Lines (the “L”), inter-urban electric lines, and Illinois Central trains. There is ample free parking space for automobiles at the Museum.



Haas, Fritz. 1941. "Florida Tree-Snails." *Field Museum news* 12(1), 6–6.

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