

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.

LIVING "STRUCTURAL ANCESTORS" OF EXTINCT ANIMALS

The fact that a living animal can be regarded as *ancestral* to a creature which has been extinct for millions of years, was the cause of an error in the March issue of FIELD MUSEUM NEWS, and may be of interest to laymen subject to occasional confusion from twists in some of the esoteric language of scientists.

When the copy for the article on the giant fossil bird *Mesembriornis* (published last month on pages 1 and 2) reached the editorial desk, it contained the following sentence:

"Cariama [a modern relative], with its marked tendency toward ground-dwelling habits, its insectivorous-carnivorous diet, and its weak powers of flight, is an almost ideal structural ancestor for the phororhacoids [the group of fossil birds to which *Mesembriornis* belonged] in which such characters and tendencies were carried to an extreme."

The word "ancestor" was stricken from the copy and "descendant" substituted on the seemingly logical and natural assumption that the living bird could not be the ancestor of the extinct one, any more than a man could be the ancestor of his great grandfather. So, with this "correction," the sentence appeared in print—sixth line from the bottom of the second column on page 2.

The writer, Mr. Bryan Patterson, Assistant Curator of Paleontology, thereupon made it plain that not only had he written

"ancestor" but he had meant "ancestor"—"structural ancestor," at least—the catch seems to be in the adjective. Following is Mr. Patterson's explanation of how and why such things can be:

"Many living animals are comparatively unmodified descendants of early ancestral stages in the evolution of the group to which they belong. To take but one example, the familiar Virginia opossum differs but little from opossums that some sixty million years ago were contemporary with the giant dinosaur *Tyrannosaurus*. There is good evidence that all marsupials evolved from these early opossums. It follows therefore that the ultimate ancestors of such diverse living forms as the kangaroo, the koala, and the pouched wolf, as well as of the giant extinct *Diprotodon*, were animals very similar to the Virginia opossum. Since the Virginia opossum is essentially similar *structurally* to these *ancestors*, one may quite logically refer to it as a 'structural ancestor' of the various animals just mentioned.

"Thus, the living caria, as the little modified descendant of a stage in the evolution of the phororhacoids, may with perfect propriety be regarded as a structural ancestor of a group of birds dead two million years or more. This term, with the special meaning explained here, is in rather general use among paleontologists."

Staff Notes

Mr. Henry S. Dybas, a graduate of the Central Y.M.C.A. College, Chicago, where he majored in zoological studies, has been appointed to the staff of Field Museum as Assistant in Entomology.

Miss Anne Harding, the artist responsible for the panel paintings in an exhibit of southwestern archaeology recently installed in Hall 7, has been given an appointment for two years on the staff of the Department of Anthropology. She will execute a series of paintings for new exhibits to be installed in the Hall of North American Archaeology (Hall B).

Dr. Fritz Haas, Curator of Lower Invertebrates, lectured before the zoological department of the University of Chicago on March 31, on the subject "The Death of Animals, and the Fate of Their Remains."

Mrs. Leota G. Thomas attended the national meeting of the Museum-School Relations Committee of the Progressive Education Association, and took part in the discussion on "How to Increase the Effective Use of Museums by the Schools." She made the keynote address advocating direction of future research on the part of the committee to find out how the schools can best prepare for museum visits, and how the museums can do a better job of teaching for the

classes that come in. Mrs. Thomas, who is a member of the Raymond Foundation staff, also conducted a conference on organization of local museum-school relations committees in cities lacking them.

Mr. Karl P. Schmidt, Chief Curator of Zoology, recently spoke before the Chicago-Illinois Bird Banding Conference at the Chicago Academy of Sciences on "Attempts to Band Blue-Racers in the Chicago Area."

Many demands have recently been made for outside lectures by Mr. Paul G. Dallwig, the Layman Lecturer of Field Museum. Among recent appearances were one before the Rotary Club on the subject, "Let's Begin to Live"; one before the Chicago Women's Club on "An Expedition in Culture"; and one before the Chicago Bar Association on "My Work for Field Museum and How I Got That Way."

Museum Host to Orientalists

The American Oriental Society, whose annual meetings are to be held in Chicago April 15-17, will have one of its general sessions—that on Wednesday afternoon, April 16—at Field Museum. Other sessions will be held at the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, and the Art Institute.

The session at Field Museum will end with a tea given by this institution for the members of the society. The American Oriental Society is one of the oldest bodies of scholars in the United States, having been founded in 1842. Its last meeting in Field Museum was in 1938.

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"), interurban electric lines, and Illinois Central trains. There is ample free parking space for automobiles at the Museum.



1941. "Living "Structural Ancestors" of Extinct Animals." *Field Museum news* 12(4), 6–6.

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Field Museum of Natural History Library

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