

I LIVE IN HONDURAS

By PAUL C. STANDLEY
CURATOR OF THE HERBARIUM

For the greater part of the past two years I have lived in Central America, in Honduras. I like Honduras. Most people of the United States who have never been in tropical America have an erroneous idea of it. They believe that the tropics are as a matter of course hot, and some of them are. I do not live in that kind of tropics, and should not care to live there. People of the temperate United States also believe generally that in the tropics it rains almost every day. That rarely if ever is true. Actually, in central Honduras it rains half the year, but seldom harder than in Chicago, while in the other six months there is no rain at all. There are many similar misconceptions of the nature of tropical lands.

I have been extremely fortunate in having the opportunity to live in one of the parts of Central America that is ideal in many respects, at the Escuela Agrícola Panamericana (Pan-American Agricultural School), located at El Zamorano, about 25 miles east of the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa. It is situated in the valley of the Río Yeguaré, at an elevation of 2,600 feet, with intensely blue mountains forming the sides of the valley. The school was developed and is maintained by the United Fruit Company, producer of most of the bananas that reach the North. Its director is Dr. Wilson Popenoe, eminent horticulturist and botanist. All expenses of the school are paid by the United Fruit Company, and the students, at present nearly 180, are given scholarships that cover all expenses for the three-year course.

COLLECTING FOR MUSEUM

During the past twenty months I have been engaged in collecting and studying plants in middle Central America under the auspices of Chicago Natural History Museum, and the results have been highly satisfying. Only two countries have been visited during this Museum expedition, Honduras and Nicaragua, and most of the time has been spent in Honduras.

During the past year a few months were spent in Nicaragua, most of the time in the eastern rain forest at El Recreo and Bluefields. This large region, little populated, is unlike other parts of Central America in several respects. It is difficult of access except by plane, and within the area practically all transportation is by the large rivers that cross it. Most travel is in dugout canoes, which in spite of their apparent lack of reliability carry the most various kinds of articles long distances to and from the coast towns. While I was at El Recreo, the most common cargoes happened to be watermelons. This area is remarkable also for its great abundance of birds, especially toucans. One afternoon on the road to Chontales (which is passable

only in the very brief dry season) there were thousands of large toucans visible at one time, almost every tree being filled with them, perched high on the branches.

Plant collecting was successful about both El Recreo, on the Río Mico, and Bluefields, the port of Atlantic Nicaragua and a most unusually attractive city for the Atlantic coast of Central America, where most towns are anything but delectable. Little botanical work has been done in eastern Nicaragua or, in fact, in the whole country.

After returning to the "interior," as the Pacific slope of Nicaragua often is called, collecting was done first around Estelí at the beginning of the rainy season. The Estelí region, like numerous other parts of Nicaragua, is noted for its deep, heavy, black soil, often overgrown with calabash trees, which becomes a quagmire as soon as the rains start. On account of this, oxen and bulls are used during the wet months as riding animals, something unknown elsewhere in Central America. Estelí is arid in the dry months. The trees lose their leaves during the prolonged dry period, but with the advent of the rains they put forth bright new leaves that give the woods much the appearance of a forest of the United States in spring.

STRANGE LOCAL PASTIME

After leaving this place, only a short time was passed collecting about Condega, also in western Nicaragua. This small town was visited by Thomas Belt and described in his classic work, *The Naturalist in Nicaragua*, one of the best books ever published about Central America. Condega is famous for a unique festival celebrated there each year. During the preceding months all sorts of wild animals—mammals, birds, and snakes—are taken alive and during the *feria* are exhibited in cages. At this time some of the animals, at least the snakes, are tortured and finally burned alive. The rather conspicuous cruelty to animals observed here probably has its origin in this celebration, which almost certainly descends from some ancient pagan custom of the locality.

During my residence in Honduras I visited all but one of the departments. In several of them no botanical collections had been made previously. Particularly attractive and botanically interesting was Olancho, a department larger than either El Salvador or Costa Rica. Until the development of air travel, which has progressed far in Honduras because of the poor highways, Olancho was isolated and the people had little contact with other parts of the country. Now, in a plane, the journey that required three days or more by horseback may be made in forty minutes.

Because of its isolation, Olancho has retained many customs and traits of colonial days. Even the Spanish spoken shows many localisms, although this is not partic-

ularly unusual in Central America. The *olanchanos* are noted also for the clarity of their speech. The region is devoted largely to the production of horses, mules, and cattle. Much gold has been obtained from the rivers, and some still is being washed there.

From Juticalpa I moved to Catacamas in the same department, which was found to be rich in plants, especially on the steep slopes of the almost completely forested high peak that rises above the town. It was strange to find on these slopes, far from either coast, the same flora that characterizes the rain forest of the Atlantic lowlands. Peculiarly interesting was the abundance of black walnut trees along the small near-by river and well up on the mountain slopes. Never have I seen so many walnut trees in other areas of Central America. Ferns, too, abounded with many species, and along the stream banks were beautiful displays of pink-flowered begonias—one of them six feet tall or more—forming dense, pure stands.

STRIPED PIGLETS

Among the curious things observed in this part of Honduras were striped piglets, which I later saw, but in much reduced numbers, elsewhere in Honduras. About half the pigs born in this part of Olancho have conspicuous black longitudinal stripes, which disappear after one or two months, evidently an inheritance from some remote ancestor. I also saw some "zebra" horses, which were not such attractive animals as the little pigs. These horses are not too conspicuous and certainly not handsome. The two I saw one day had very fine vertical striping of sorrel or almost bay and white, which gave the effect of a corded fabric.

Of botanical curiosities there is true popcorn, which is much like that of the United States and pops almost equally well. True popcorn and sweet corn are exceedingly rare in Central America. Olancho, too, is noted for its palm wine, which was in season in March when I was there. Tall coyol palm trees are cut, the spiny leaves removed, and the trunks dragged to some central location and laid on the ground. A trough is cut along the upper side and covered with leaves. In a short while the trough is filled with the clear "wine," which is a favorite beverage with most people who know it. Slightly fermented when ready to drink, it would be much better if not heated by the sun, as usually it is.

A short but profitable trip was made at the harvest season to the town of Pespire, near the Pacific coast of Honduras, and from there to the little village of San Antonio de Padua, perched high on a shelf of a mountain side. It had been reported that there grew wild at this locality the grass usually called teosinte, the only wild grass closely related to maize. This trip was made to verify the occurrence of the puzzling

plant, which was unknown previously in the wild south of Guatemala.

Other trips in Honduras of varying length were to San Marcos de Colón near the Nicaraguan frontier, Choluteca, in the same department but at low elevation, to Danlí, a delightful town also near the Nicaraguan border, to Comayagua, former capital of both Honduras and Central America, to the department of La Paz near by, and to Intibucá and Santa Rosa Copán (this is a quite different place from the famous Maya ruins of Copán).

STAFF NOTES

Gustaf Dalstrom, Artist in the Department of Anthropology, has been commissioned to paint a mural of the meteor crater in Arizona for Adler Planetarium. The work is being done in addition to his usual duties at this Museum. He was sent for a few days by the Planetarium authorities via air to Arizona to make sketches and aerial photographs . . . **Colin C. Sanborn**, Curator of Mammals, last month attended the meetings of the American Society of Mammalogists at Yellowstone National Park . . . **Clifford H. Pope**, Curator of Amphibians and Reptiles, is spending five weeks at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, where he is engaged in studies on African snakes . . . **Harry E. Changnon**, Curator of Exhibits in Geology, **Robert K. Wyant**, Curator of Economic Geology, and **Eugene S. Richardson, Jr.**, Curator of Fossil Invertebrates, attended technical sessions of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists and affiliated societies that recently met in Chicago . . . **Dr. Austin L. Rand**, Curator of Birds, recently spoke over radio station WJJD on "Bird Nests." . . **Colin C. Sanborn**, Curator of Mammals, attended a meeting of the 5th Army Insect and Rodent Control Training Course at Fort Sheridan. **Rupert L. Wenzel**, Assistant Curator of Insects, also spoke before the meeting . . . **Dr. Theodor Just**, Chief Curator of Botany, presented a paper on "Mesozoic Plant Microfossils and Their Geological Significance" at the symposium on applied paleobotany held as part of the recent program of the Society of Economic Paleobotanists and Mineralogists in Chicago.

STORIES IN HAIR AND FUR

During the month of August and the first twenty days of September, a period when many women by a strange anachronism think about winter furs and shop for them, the Museum will display in Stanley Field Hall a special exhibit on the subject prepared by the Cranbrook Institute of Science. By means of specimens, some of which may be handled, photographs, and drawings, the 30 panels comprising the exhibit will give

much enlightening information on the commercial treatment and uses of fur and hair. The exhibit is calculated to be of great general interest as well as of particular value to prospective purchasers of furs and those concerned with the economic aspects of the fur industry.

BERMUDA ZOOLOGICAL EXPEDITION

The 1950 Bermuda Zoological Expedition will leave July 5 for undersea work from the Bermuda Biological Station for Research, Inc., on St. George's. **Dr. Fritz Haas**, Curator of Lower Invertebrates, will be the leader of the expedition, assisted by **Joseph B. Krstolich**, Artist in the Department of Zoology. Collecting and research will be conducted for a period of about two months. **Dr. Haas** will concentrate on the scientific angles, and **Mr. Krstolich** will do the technical work. **Mr. Krstolich**, provided with boats and complete diving equipment, will spend considerable time making undersea color photographs and color notes for a proposed habitat group showing coral formations as they appear under the water.

Invertebrate Fossil Collecting

Eugene S. Richardson, Jr., Curator of Fossil Invertebrates, will leave Chicago on July 20 to collect fossils from several important localities in western Wyoming and southeastern Idaho.

NEW MEMBERS

The following persons became Museum Members between May 16 and June 15:

Benefactors

Boardman Conover*

Contributors

Emil Eitel*

Associate Members

Eginton Franklin, Adolf Marx, Ross D. Siragusa.

Sustaining Members

D. H. Wilson

Annual Members

Mrs. Ivan Albright, George C. Anderson, J. H. Buchanan, Robert Davol Budlong, Francis J. Cuneo, J. Philip David, Howard Granger Earl, Preston H. Early, J. F. Ferguson, Rev. George A. Fowler, C. T. Gilchrist, G. B. Goble, Joseph G. Hagstrom, Philip Hampson, Robert E. Hattis, Harold F. Haubrich, Daniel T. Hayes, Dr. Rudolph J. Hennemeyer, Mrs. Willis W. Judd, Miss Ruth Loughhead, Mrs. Victoria D. MacDonald, John J. O'Connor, George E. Phoenix, Mrs. Arthur C. Prince, O. R. Roach, Daniel B. Ryan, John P. Schrader, Paul Schulze, Jr., Oscar J. Smolka, William N. Spencer, Dr. I. Joshua Spiegel, William C. Wenninger.

* Deceased

LOUIS B. BISHOP, 1865-1950

Dr. Louis B. Bishop, Research Associate of the Museum since 1939, died in his 85th year, at Pasadena, California, on April 3, 1950. **Dr. Bishop** was given the honorary appointment on the staff of the Museum as Research Associate in the Division of Birds when the Museum acquired from him "The Bishop Collection" of birds.



LOUIS B. BISHOP

Dr. Bishop was born in New Haven, Connecticut, June 5, 1865. He was graduated from Yale University and continued studies in medicine in the special field of pediatrics that he expected to follow professionally. However, his interest in birds led him to spend his life studying them and assembling the Bishop Collection. His expeditions took him to eastern Canada, the Middle West, to Yukon and Alaska. In these last areas he traveled with **Dr. Wilfred H. Osgood**, late Chief Curator of Zoology of the Museum. In addition, **Dr. Bishop** had collectors in the field from Alaska to Mexico.

The Bishop Collection was assembled in the period when large private collections, such as this and the William Brewster Collection, now in the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the Jonathan Dwight Collection, now in the American Museum of Natural History, New York, rivaled in importance those of public institutions. The Bishop Collection totaled more than 50,000 birds, representing nearly all the known North American birds north of Mexico, and included in it were at least 19 type specimens and 33 skins of extinct birds. With its acquisition Chicago Natural History Museum became one of the important centers for material on which the research on the evolution and variation of North American birds was based. After the Bishop Collection came to Chicago, **Dr. Bishop**, though residing in California, continued to work on material he had retained for study and to have collectors add to it, so that we continued to receive material from him up until the present.

With his passing is gone one of the last links with the old school of ornithologists, the men of the 19th century, many of whom studied medicine as their scientific training, who did much of the pioneer work of classifying and arranging the discoveries of the preceding era. They were the workers who presented the first comprehensive picture of the variation and distribution of North American birds.

AUSTIN L. RAND
Curator of Birds



Standley, Paul Carpenter. 1950. "I Live in Honduras." *Bulletin* 21(7), 6–7.

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