

Author and Artist . . .

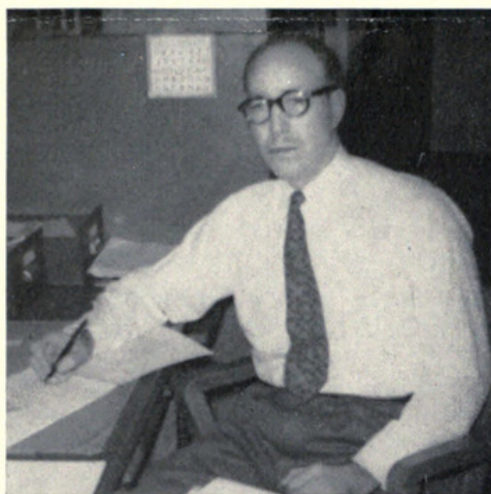
BLAKE FASCINATED BY BIRDS SINCE BOYHOOD; TIBBITTS' ILLUSTRATIONS IMBUED WITH LIFE

(A description of the new book, *BIRDS OF MEXICO*, appears on page 3.)

BY AUSTIN L. RAND
CURATOR OF BIRDS

WHAT MANNER OF MAN is this who writes a book about Mexican birds? The fact that he's six foot two, weighs 190 pounds, is fortyish, graying, and wears horn-rimmed spectacles and an affable smile tells us little because naturalists, like sprinters, come in various sizes and shapes.

The frequency with which the Museum is asked, "How does one become a natural-



EMMET R. BLAKE

The author of "Birds of Mexico" at his desk.

ist?" leads me to probe into the background of this one. To most naturalists the urge to study natural history comes early. The bent of the twig determines the shape of the tree. So it was with Emmet Reid Blake—"Snakey" to his boyhood friends in South Carolina; Emmet to his teachers; and Bob to his intimates. At the age of four, under his mother's direction, he was feeding the young sparrows in a nest in the attic window of their Greenwood home. At the age of ten he was skinning and "stuffing" birds under the tutelage of a distant relative, and assembling his own museum.

At Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina, the sympathetic guidance of his professors, especially Dr. Marshall W. Brown, history professor, and the late Dr. Frank Dudley Jones, who also had a deep interest in natural history, allowed Bob to develop his main interests. He gathered material for another museum. Room was found for this in a dormitory awaiting modernization, and over the door in a dramatic pose was placed a buzzard that came to bear the name of one of the less popular professors.

A sound physique is an advantage to any

man, but to a naturalist-explorer who will penetrate distant jungles in strenuous and even dangerous travels, it is necessary. We find Bob taking boxing lessons as a boy, excelling at track, and winning boxing titles. Once, on a summer vacation from college, he found himself in a Florida carnival where a professional boxer offered a purse of \$75 to anyone who could stay four rounds with him. Bob not only stayed four rounds, but knocked out the pro. Though it hardly comes under the heading of track, there's a story that Bob, returning from South Carolina to Pittsburgh where he was doing graduate work, covered the 900 miles on roller skates, as an economical method of travel.

A naturalist alternates his periods of travel and activity with periods of quiet research in the seclusion of a museum study. As a student Bob excelled only in biology. Other subjects didn't interest him. But his writing began early. When he was ten a roost of thousands of purple martins occupied the Greenwood square. The townspeople thought them a nuisance. The firemen, armed with shotguns, sought to abate the nuisance by a frightful slaughter. This so perturbed Bob that he wrote a long letter of protest to the local press, a letter that, published in full, put the ten-year old lad in embarrassing limelight.

One thing a naturalist needs above all is tenacity of purpose, and to find his reward in work well done. With a B. A. degree from Presbyterian College, only one thing was obvious to Bob. He was going to work in a museum. The need for a higher degree was a corollary, as was the need for part-time, paying employment. Pittsburgh had a museum, a university, and a Y. M. C. A. where Bob had a half-promise of a job as boxing instructor. There he went. Then came a period that was a kaleidoscope of museum experience, taking university studies and art work, a graduate instructorship in zoology, giving boxing and swimming instructions, and doing remunerative odd jobs. Here he first came under the influence of professional naturalists: W. E. C. Todd, now Curator Emeritus of Birds of the Carnegie Museum at Pittsburgh, and Rudyerd Boulton who later came to be Curator of Birds at Chicago Natural History Museum.

FIRST VENTURES IN FIELD

Many a naturalist got his start in his chosen field by going on an expedition. By now Bob knew how to prepare museum specimens, and he knew what museums wanted. Bob's chance came to go to Brazil and Venezuela on a National Geographic Society expedition which needed someone who could collect. It meant interrupting

his schooling, but that was of minor importance. He went into the tropics, fortunate in having the veteran naturalist-explorer, Ernest Holt, as leader of the expedition to initiate him into jungle ways. That the collecting, the long days on the trail and the long hours preparing specimens agreed with Bob, and that he was a success, we can judge by the fact that a few months after his return he received and accepted a chance to head an expedition to Venezuela for our Chicago museum (then called Field Museum of Natural History). There, on one little-known mountain called Turumiquire, he made what may be a record: single-handed he collected 803 birds, 96 reptiles, and 37 mammals in 35 days.

Returning and completing his master's degree at the University of Pittsburgh was routine for Bob. Then came more expeditions: to British Honduras for Carnegie Museum, to Guatemala for Chicago Natural History Museum, and finally in 1935, a place on our staff. More expeditions followed; ranging from our Southwest to the Guianas in South America, on each of which he collected scientific specimens and materials for exhibition.

Then came the war; in 1942 Bob entered the Army and served with the Counter Intelligence Corps in North Africa and Europe. Back in the United States in 1946 with the rank of captain and various medals including the Purple Heart, he was soon in the Museum again.

RESEARCH AND WRITING

There's a saying in museum circles that specimens might as well be left in the jungle as stored, unstudied, in museum drawers. Their value is in the use made of them; it lies in the information that is yielded by them, and published, to be available to all. Back from the war, Bob dug into studying tropical American birds—collections from countries in which he'd made expeditions. His time was occupied with research and

'BIRDS OF MEXICO' BOOK IN MUSEUM SHOP

The Book Shop of the Museum will have copies of "Birds of Mexico" available for purchase by visitors, or on mail order. The book, subtitled "A Guide for Field Identification," is by Emmet Reid Blake, Associate Curator of Birds, with illustrations by Staff Artist Douglas E. Tibbitts. It is published by the University of Chicago Press. The price is \$6.

On Saturday, April 18, Curator Blake will be present in the Book Shop to autograph copies purchased by visitors.

writing. During this period he married Margaret Bird. With their two children they now live in Evanston, whence he commutes regularly to the Museum. The Museum has published descriptions of new birds, revisions, and faunal reports from his pen. A pamphlet on how to prepare birds in the field was a Museum need, and Bob supplied that.

Then came the Mexican handbook, a two-and-a-half year task. There's a lot known about Mexican birds; there's the *Catalogue of the Birds of the Americas*, published by our Museum, that occupies about two-and-one-half feet on the book shelf and lists all the kinds of Mexican birds, amongst others, with ranges and the names under which they used to be known; there's the *Birds of Middle and North America*, now measuring about two feet on the bookshelf and still incomplete, put out by the United States National Museum, with descriptions and keys. But this knowledge is inaccessible to all but the specialist with a library and a collection to work with. The many Americans going to Mexico and the continually increasing interest in birds demanded a key to unlock this store of knowledge; to make it available to the many. This is the need that dictated the present volume, *Birds of Mexico*, and this is the volume, I predict, that will meet this need admirably.

Artist of Broad Talents

OUR ARTIST is a versatile man. Douglas E. Tibbitts' splendid illustrations in *Birds of Mexico* represent only one facet of his varied artistic talents and the myriad



DOUGLAS E. TIBBITTS
Illustrator of "Birds of Mexico."

tasks he performs at the Museum. As Staff Artist you may find him one day drawing the tiny teeth of a cretaceous mammal with the aid of a microscope, or the flowering parts of an orchid, a fossil fish, or a ceremonial dance mask, to illustrate a scientific paper; the next day he may be making a broadly outlined illustration for nature leaflets aimed at school child level, or a

poster announcing Museum lectures to the public. He has just finished painting the large-scale landscape background for a sea otter habitat group, and has others for a tapir group and a Nile River marsh-bird group in hand. It might send another man mad, or grizzle him with worry, but Tibbitts stays cheerful.

Born in Reedburg, Wisconsin, in 1919, he went to the University of Wisconsin. At one time he was following his natural history interests into game management, but settled for a straight arts course, majoring in zoology, with some extra art work. He'd always drawn things, and in school his laboratory drawings attracted the attention of his professors for whom he illustrated a general zoology book. A *Fishes of Wisconsin* was planned and he prepared pen-and-ink drawings and water-colors for that.

His college work was interrupted by four war years when he served with the combat engineers in the British Isles, North Africa, and Italy. Returning, he got his B. A. from the University of Wisconsin in 1948, and came to the Museum that autumn.

DEMANDS ARE ALWAYS 'URGENT'

The walls of his office are lined with paintings of birds, fishes, and mammals in various stages of completion, and prominently displayed is a bulletin board with up to a score of requisitions for illustrations, each requested "as soon as possible."

He commutes from nearby Palatine where he lives with his wife, Marion, and their three-year old daughter. He has little time just now for his hobby of photography, but his continued activity in the study of natural history, which earlier produced a published paper on the behavior of the red-winged blackbird, recently resulted in his making the first Chicago record of the pigmy shrew, a specimen he caught in his garage.

Within the broad field of natural history in art, his especial interest is the painting of birds and mammals. It's unfortunate that the Mexican handbook could not have more of his paintings in color, like the frontispiece that is reproduced on the cover of this BULLETIN. But the 329 line-drawings that show what examples of each family are like serve their purpose well, for in that field Tibbitts is a master.

Daily Guide-Lectures

Free guide-lecture tours are offered at 2 P.M. daily except Sundays under the title "Highlights of the Exhibits." These tours are designed to give a general idea of the entire Museum and its scope of activities.

Special tours on subjects within the range of the Museum exhibits are available Mondays through Fridays for parties of ten or more persons. Requests for such service must be made at least one week in advance.

Although there are no tours on Sundays, the Museum is open to visitors as usual from 9 A.M. to 5 P.M.

A Special Exhibit . . .

STEPS IN THE MAKING OF A BOOK SHOWN

By JOHN R. MILLAR
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

THE MAKING OF A BOOK is no small chore. It requires much time and co-ordinated efforts of many people. Although most of us are deluged with printed matter of all kinds, some of which seems to spring up spontaneously overnight to land in the incinerator the next morning, the nature and sequence of events in the production of printed matter is understood by few.

The publication by the University of Chicago Press of what promises to be a useful and popular book on the birds of Mexico, written by one member of Chicago Natural History Museum's staff and illustrated by another, has been chosen as the occasion for a temporary exhibit that points out the steps involved in making a book of this kind. *This special exhibit will be on view from April 1 to 30 inclusive.*

Book production is divided into three provinces: that of the author, the publisher, and the printer. The author starts the ball rolling with an idea. Authorship entails



BLUE-HOODED EUPHONIA

Male at left, female at right. An illustration by Douglas E. Tibbitts in "Birds of Mexico."

having something worth while to say, the training and skill to say it, and, in the case of non-fiction, the facts to back up what is said. It is here that the Museum enters the field. One of the functions of Chicago Natural History Museum is to acquire and preserve specimens of the animal and plant life of the world, particularly of the New World. Over a period of years, by collecting, by purchase, and by exchange with other institutions and individuals, the Museum's study collection of birds has come to contain all but a very few of the birds known to occur in Mexico. This collection was primary source material for the author of the book under discussion. The Museum also maintains one of the largest and best of the libraries devoted to natural history. Also, by virtue of its standing among scientific institutions here and abroad, the Museum is able to borrow from other collections and libraries both specimens and books



Rand, Austin Loomer. 1953. "Blake Fascinated by Birds Since Boyhood; Tibbitts' Illustrations Imbued with Life." *Bulletin* 24(4), 4–5.

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