

BIRD-MAN FINDS PHILIPPINE LOWLANDS HOT AND NOISY, BUT FASCINATING

By AUSTIN L. RAND
CURATOR OF BIRDS

IT'S HOT at midday in the cogon grass country of the Philippine lowlands. And it's bright, too, with sunshine reflected from the pale coarse grass. Sweat runs into my eyes, and, when I stop to rest under a tree, the sweat doesn't dry off to cool me. This is the real tropics, where the sun glares down all day.

The cogon grass is a sad thing to see. The forest has been cleared and the soil cultivated for a few seasons. Then when the soil has been exhausted and left, this coarse grass and a few scattered trees grow over it. Periodically the grass is burned in the dry season. The grass country is almost birdless. Only occasionally is a grass warbler (*Cisticola*) seen.

Our camp (December 19 to 29) is on a point overlooking the junction of the Inuboanga and the Siconon rivers. We had cleared away the lantana leaving the second-growth trees for shade. Now we have practically a barrio with twenty-two people. Besides Dr. D. S. Rabor* and his family and several relatives there are a group of Silliman University students (majors in biology), a cook, two preparators, and myself. Everyone shares in everything—the collecting, the preparing, the camp work. Sometimes the lanterns burn until 10 P.M. while six or seven people toil at preparing specimens. The knowledge of these people about the inhabitants of the forest is really surprising—not only of birds but of other vertebrates and of invertebrates and plants. Certainly when these students go out into teaching or into the business world of the Philippine Islands, the forest and its life will have a special meaning for them. They will be the people who will make natural science a living thing in the Philippines.

SOUND EFFECTS FROM A BAMBOO GROVE

There's a bamboo grove on the point opposite our camp that is a beautiful thing under the full moon. A bamboo grove in the evening when most other noises die is a noisy place. First the slightest breath of air sends the branches together to give hollow, tapping sounds, loud or faint. Then there are the branches that rub together to give scrapings and squeals and squeaks and groans, the leaves that rustle, and the dead leaves that come down with a whispering to land with a patting.

A medley of chuckles, squawks, gurgles, and plaintive "wooa's" come from the river-side bamboos each evening, just at dusk. At first I thought it might be a band of monkeys quarreling, or a couple of wildcats fighting. But Dr. Rabor knew it was a

rail, the calls probably all coming from a single bird, though it certainly sounds like several. To these the giant gecko adds a chur, and then a loud "gek-ko." A nightjar adds a "choc-choc." The owls (*Ninox philippensis*), when they really get together, serenade us noisily. Sometimes it's a "kok," sometimes it's "hoo-KOK," sometimes "hoo-kok-KOK-KOK," or some variation of it, and then apparently two or more owls can call together giving a medley of calls, and some of the calls seem to change to growls. And always, of course, from camp one hears the college boys' guitar and their songs.

We came down here in a public bus. The surprising thing to me is that a Philip-

obscuring the farther hills. Sometimes the rain clouds are farther, sometimes nearer. Once they reached here, but with a faint spray that really wet nothing, and soon disappeared.

A visit to a near-by high plateau of farming country allowed Dr. Rabor to add two new birds to his Negros list: one is a blackish bush lark that I look forward to studying in the Museum because it may be a new form. The other is the skylark, a migrant from Eurasia. It may well be that Negros will come to be the best-explored island, zoologically, in the archipelago, thanks to the intensive work of Dr. Rabor. Formerly Luzon, in the vicinity of Manila, would have been so considered.

STRANGLER FIGS

One day, in the forest, I noticed especially the strangler figs. Remembering the philosopher Alfred Whitehead's view that violence and strife defeats itself and that peaceful co-operation, as exemplified by a forest, is the acme of development, I wondered how he would rationalize the activities of these figs. Strangler figs they're called and the name indicates just what they do. At first they're slender vines supported by a forest tree; gradually they branch and expand. The vine-like branches as they go up the tree trunk become laced together with a series of cross branches that look like the cross brace in a steel girder. Finally they coalesce and completely surround the trunk. The leafy branches of the fig take over the crown. The original tree that helped give the fig its start is dead and rots away, while the fig takes its place. This looks like exploitation rather than co-operation. The slowness of the strangling alone makes it undramatic.

Common sandpipers, migrants from Eurasia, are frequently encountered along our river, feeding singly along the tiny beaches most of the day. They make flights, apparently to and from a sleeping place. In the evenings the birds pass down-river; I've seen flocks of up to a dozen or so. As they go downstream, the birds that have spent much of the day near our camp spring up and join them. In the mornings the small flocks pass upstream, dropping off birds here and there as they pass. One flock, at the fork of the river, split up and part went each way. Though solitary in feeding, sandpipers seem to like company in sleeping.

The bat lorikeets I found fairly common here for the first time. They're tiny, for parrots, barely sparrow size, bright green, and decked with red. They get their name from their habit of sleeping hanging head down from their perch, like a bat, instead of sitting on the perch like most birds do. Up till now a glimpse of a passing bird was all I'd seen. But here I found a fruit tree

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PHILIPPINE PICTURE-STORY
SCHEDULED FOR APRIL

Two pages of sketches of life in the Philippine Islands will be published in the April issue of Chicago Natural History Museum "Bulletin." The drawings, by Miss Ruth Johnson of the staff of the Department of Zoology, were prepared from field sketches made by Dr. Austin L. Rand, Curator of Birds, during the study trip to the Philippines from which he recently returned.

pine bus is never full. We kept stopping along the road and picking up people when it seemed that surely there could be no room for more! The baggage compartment at the back was full of people (the baggage is on the roof and under the floor), and the children were all standing. Some fighting cocks were in cages on the roof, while others were in passengers' arms. A few people hung on the outside.

JOURNEY AFOOT BEGINS

At kilometer 95, at the Siconon River, we dismounted, sent our luggage up river by canoe, and walked overland for two hours to our camp—first through paddy fields, with a stalk of sugar cane from a near-by patch to chew on, then cogon grass ridges with little streams and strips of forest between, to the junction of the Inuboanga and Siconon rivers, where the forest patches, on gullies and coral-limestone ridges, begin to occupy as much area as does the cogon grass. Northward and inland the amount of forest increases, and low ranges of hills lead by steps to the distant east Negros range where I worked early in the month. Southward there's a glimpse of the blue Sulu Sea some ten kilometers away.

It's interesting to be in this dry, hot country and look inland to see rain clouds

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On Saturday Mornings . . .**FREE PROGRAMS OF MOVIES
OFFERED FOR CHILDREN**

It's free movie-time again for children on Saturday mornings at the Museum. Eight programs will be presented during March and April by the Raymond Foundation in the James Simpson Theatre. All begin at 10:30 A.M. Story-tellers—the men who made the films—will appear on three of the shows.

The titles of the films, with dates, follow:

March 6—Life in a Pond

Also a cartoon

March 13—Legends and Animal Folk-Stories

Also a cartoon

March 20—New Zealand Highlights

Dr. Alfred M. Bailey, narrator

March 27—Jungle Career

Game-Ranger Oliver Milton, narrator

April 3—So Dear to My Heart

(Disney film-story of a boy and his black lamb)

April 10—The Grass Forest

Robert C. Hermes, narrator

April 17—Jordan Valley (Biblical Lands)

Also a cartoon

April 24—Wheels Across Australia

Also a cartoon

PHILIPPINES—

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where pigeons, flowerpeckers, and starlings fed and, more important, these little parrots. Apparently they are usually solitary. Even when a number gathered in one tree they betrayed their unsociability by making pugnacious rushes at each other. One, seeing me, cocked its head inquiringly and gave a high, thin "tic-tic-tic-tic" of disturbance. In clambering about and reaching for fruit they seem to have no regard for gravity, but climb, feed, and rest oriented most any way.

One day, crossing a marshy swale, Dr. Rabor and I came on a small herd of carabao, turned loose to graze because they were not needed in agricultural work in the dry season. The great, ungainly beasts put up their heads, sniffed, and began to come closer through the reeds. Perhaps it was only to get a better view, but perhaps, as Rabor said, they thought we were the people who brought them salt. But looking at their horns and their unresponsive faces, thoughts came to me of stories I'd heard of people attacked by carabao. They can be dangerous. We started away, but this

seemed to spur the carabao to faster action. I looked about for the nearest tree. But Dr. Rabor stopped, spoke to them, in Visayan, and then came on leaving the carabao standing, staring.

The forest patches interested us particularly. These were magnificent forests left on the rougher ground, not suitable for farming. In the typical forest there were three "stories" or "canopy" layers. The tops of the tallest trees gave a canopy of leaves high overhead, perhaps 100 feet or more up. Below this, a stand of lower "undergrowth" trees gave the second canopy, from 50 to 70 feet above the ground, while nearer the ground was yet another layer. The ground was fairly clear of obscuring vegetation, and we could see far among the trunks. One day we watched a pitta, a red-breasted, green-backed ground bird of the forest floor that was undecided about fleeing. It hopped back and forth and, to stress its agitation, it depressed its absurdly short tail and flicked it up again. In a bird with a longer tail, or with bright tail-markings, some social significance might be postulated, but it seems strange in a bird with such an insignificant tail. Another time we saw, as part of a bird party, a magnificent crested blue monarch flycatcher, a bird so rare that even Dr. Rabor had only seen one once before. Several times we saw the spotted forest kingfisher and rough-templed babbler with yellow "ear tufts," both Negros endemics. The magpie robin's sweet whistled song, infrequently heard, was the finest voice of the forest, but the background of bird-song was that of the dull-colored bulbul, whose pleasant song has a placid pleasantness that I learned to enjoy.

NEW MEMBERS

The following persons became Museum Members from January 8 to February 12:

Contributor

Langdon Pearse

Associate Members

Lambert Bere, James W. Close, Frank G. Hough, Dr. Arthur Loewy, DeWitt J. Manasse

Annual Members

Eaton Adams, Frank G. Anger, Ormsby Annan, Donald R. Arnold, C. M. Blumen-schein, Carl J. Briese, Harry A. Clark, Mrs. Florence Conrad, William B. Doyle, W.M. Flerlage, Raymond Garbe, Robert H. Garretson, W. H. Garvey, Jr., Jacob Gottlieb, David Graham, Herbert S. Greenwald, Matthew J. Hickey, Jr., B. E. Hopper, J. N. Hunter, Rex K. John, Jr., Howard B. Ketting, William S. Kirkland, Stuart List, Dr. Clayton G. Loosli, Robert E. Maxwell, William A. McGuineas, Benjamin S. Naven, Seymour Oppenheimer, Herbert C. Paschen, Nicholas Pergo, O. M. Pick, Frank W. Prindiville, Colonel William G. Purdy, Dr. Herbert Rattner, G. W. Reilly, George Samuelson, John V. Sandberg, Harry R. Sanow, Mrs. William M. Scudder, Harry M.

On Sunday Afternoons . . .**THE MUSEUM'S OWN STORY
ON DALLWIG PROGRAM**

The origin and history of museums, of which little is known to the average layman, will be discussed on Sunday afternoons in March by Paul G. Dallwig, the Layman Lecturer, under the title "Behind the Scenes in Our Museums." Mr. Dallwig will trace the development of the modern museum from its beginnings to its present place as an important research institution for both scholars and laymen. He will discuss the place of museums in our educational system, their value to the community, and the probable lines of their future development. The lecture will be illustrated with selected exhibits in this Museum that show the modern trend in illumination, art, color, and techniques. The same lecture will be given at 2 P.M. on each Sunday of the month—March 7, 14, 21, and 28.

Museum Members are admitted to these lectures upon presentation of their membership cards; others must make reservations in advance by mail or telephone (Wabash 2-9410).

**Panorama of America Offered
in Audubon Screen-Tour**

Color motion-pictures of a 50,000-mile journey around America will be shown on the program, "America the Beautiful," to be presented by the Illinois Audubon Society in the James Simpson Theatre of the Museum on Sunday, March, 14, at 2:30 P.M. The accompanying lecture will be given by Tom and Arlene Hadley, well-known team of naturalists of Holly, Michigan.

Gifts to the Museum

Following is a list of the principal gifts received during the past month:

Department of Anthropology:

From: Hughston M. McBain, Chicago—Japanese sword, 17th century, Japan

Department of Botany:

From: Dr. F. R. Fosberg, Washington, D.C.—55 algae, Marshall Islands; Albert J. Franzen, Chicago—3 cryptogams, Illinois; Dr. D. Hilliard, Anchorage, Alaska—36 algae, Alaska; Dr. N. Ibanez, Trujillo, Peru—24 algae, Peru; Dr. Hugh Iltis, Fayetteville, Ark.—66 algae, Arkansas and Costa Rica; Dr. L. B. Isham, Coral Gables, Fla.—27 algae, Florida; Institute of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica—35 algae, Jamaica; S. C. Johnson and Son, Inc., Racine, Wis.—Copernicia material, Paraguay and Brazil

Sears, Carl J. Sharp, Robert D. Shaver, Robert E. Shylin, Miss Mary Frances Smith, J. B. Spaulding, Oliver R. Sperry, W. J. Stebler, Herbert R. Stratford, Dr. Philip Thorek, Eugene C. Travis, Donald P. Vail, Everett A. Weathers, William E. Welch, Mrs. S. F. Zelinsky



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