

## Chicago Natural History Museum

FOUNDED BY MARSHALL FIELD, 1893

Roosevelt Road and Lake Shore Drive, Chicago 5  
TELEPHONE: WABASH 2-9410

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

### The Strange Case of

## THE 'FLYING LOBSTER'

BY FRITZ HAAS

CURATOR OF LOWER INVERTEBRATES

One day last month a Chicago daily newspaper consulted the Museum on a report that a "lobster" had been dropped from the sky into Waukegan, Illinois, during a violent rain-and-hail storm. A nature lover in that city was said to have made a test that "proved" to his satisfaction that the creature in question was a "salt-water lobster." However, the little animal that dropped from the sky was brought to the Museum where it was identified as a fresh-water inhabitant—a young specimen of one of our commonest crawfishes. It is of a species that abounds in our rivers, creeks, ponds, and even in shallow areas of Lake Michigan.

This issue being cleared up, it remained to be determined if the crawfish really was dropped into the Waukegan street by a rain-storm. This, it must be conceded, is perfectly possible because quite a few similar cases are known. An authentic instance is recorded of a multitude of fresh-water clams being dropped by a tornado into a town some miles distant from the ponds where the clams had lived. At least seven equally

well documented cases of a "fish rain" have been reported from South Carolina and India. Therefore there is nothing to prohibit us from believing that the "flying" crawfish may have been removed from shallow water somewhere near Waukegan by a strong gust of wind, carried through the air as long as the gust lasted, and dropped when the wind's violence lessened.

There are other strange phenomena that folklore associates with rainfall, although they are not directly caused by it. For example, there is the so-called "frog rain"—the sudden appearance of innumerable tiny frogs or toads after a heavy rain. These animals do not rain from the sky, of course, but are lured out of their hiding places by the cool wetness following the rain. Then there is the "blood rain" or sudden appearance in fresh puddles of a blood-red color that has given rise to many superstitions. The red color is caused, however, by the quick growth of unicellular organisms, mostly of the microscopic alga *Sphaerella pluvialis*, after dry spots, where their spores were lying, have been flooded.

### STAFF NOTES

John W. Moyer, who has been on leave of absence from the Museum for more than two years while serving as Consul of the United States in India, has returned to his studio here as head of the Division of Motion Pictures. . . . Bryan Patterson, Curator of Fossil Mammals, has left for Argentina where, under the recent grant of his second Guggenheim Foundation fellowship, he will continue a paleontological research project initiated several years ago. . . .

D. Dwight Davis, Curator of Vertebrate Anatomy, has returned to the Museum after a six-month leave of absence during which he served as a visiting professor at California Institute of Technology in Pasadena. . . . Rupert L. Wenzel, Curator of Insects, has returned from a 10,000-mile field and study trip to the West. For about eight weeks he collected histerid beetles and other insects at some seventy localities in the Southwest, along the Pacific Coast, and in the Pacific Northwest.

### National Science Foundation Grant to Entomologist

A National Science Foundation grant has been awarded to Dr. Charles H. Seevers, Research Associate in the Museum's Division of Insects, to help subsidize his studies on the classification of the beetles of the family Staphylinidae. Dr. Seevers, who is chairman of the department of biology at Roosevelt College, will spend six months during each of the next two years studying important collections both in this country

### THIS MONTH'S COVER

The statue of a woman holding a child and a book of learning, a sculpture by Henry Hering called "Dissemination of Knowledge," symbolizes one of the four principal purposes of the Museum. It is one of four statues in Stanley Field Hall that flank the north and south archways. The others are "Natural Science," "Research," and "Record." Hering, a New York sculptor, well known since the 1890's, was commissioned at the time of construction of the present building to express, in these heroic figures that blend with the architecture, the aims of the Museum. He is the author also of many monuments and other sculptural works that dot bridge pylons and buildings elsewhere in Chicago and other cities. This photograph was made by the Museum's Division of Photography.

and Europe to supplement his current research on this Museum's notable Max Bernhauer Collection acquired in Austria in 1951. He will revise the generic classification of the largest and least-known subfamily, the *Aleocharinae*. Dr. Seevers, who is known best to entomologists for his studies on the Staphylinidae that live with termites, recently completed a world monograph, scheduled for publication by the Museum, on the classification and evolution of these beetles.

### Museum Aids Science on TV

Chicago Natural History Museum furnished the "props"—anthropological specimens from various parts of the world—for the nationally telecast program "What in the World?" (CBS), originating in the University of Pennsylvania Museum in Philadelphia, on August 8. Several of the objects shown "stumped" the members of the panel, well-known scientists who by deductive methods attempt to identify their origin and purpose.

### Museum Pensioner Dies

The death on August 18 of Valerie Legault, veteran former Museum employee, is recorded with regret. Mr. Legault, who was born in 1865, worked here from 1906 until his retirement on pension in 1940, first as a carpenter and later in the N. W. Harris Public School Extension and the Department of Geology.





Haas, Fritz. 1954. "The 'Flying Lobster'" *Bulletin* 25(9), 2-2.

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