

OSAGE ORANGE WOOD PRIZED BY INDIANS FOR BOWS

By LLEWELYN WILLIAMS

Assistant Curator of Economic Botany

When the early French settlers landed in Louisiana in the seventeenth century and explored the surrounding territory they discovered many plants and trees that were new to them. West of the Mississippi, near a village of the Osage Indians, they found a number of small, thorny trees with globular, golden-colored fruit. Perhaps with scornful reference to the inedible qualities of the fruit, they called it Osage orange or mock orange, although it has no botanical relationship to the citrus fruits.

The compact, elastic wood of the Osage orange tree was prized by the Indians for making war clubs and bows—hence the French name *bois d'arc* (bow-wood), now corrupted to bodark. Chroniclers relate that the price of a bow was a horse and blanket. The wood is known in different localities by various other names such as bodeck, yellow-wood, Osage apple tree, or hedge tree. The scientific designation is *Maclura aurantiaca*, in honor of William Maclure, an eminent geologist.

The natural range of the tree is limited to southern Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, the region of its greatest abundance being the valley of the Red River. In the south it was formerly planted to mark the boundaries of plantations and it is still used in the middle west for hedges.

Although the mock orange belongs to the same family as the mulberry and fig, its wood does not share the characteristic of softness found in their woods. Osage orange wood is exceptionally hard and heavy, noted for its strength and durability, its resistance to atmospheric changes, and its virtual incorruptibility in contact with the soil. The heartwood is brilliant yellow, but turns brown upon exposure. It takes a lustrous polish.

Osage orange wood is in demand for felloes of wagons used in sandy regions, insulator pins, fence posts, and bridge piling. The bark of the root yields a yellow dye used by the early pioneers on homespun cloth, and now employed as a substitute for dyes obtained from fustic.

An exhibit of Osage orange, showing trunk, a wheel section, and typical boards, with photographs of a tree and fruiting branch, has been added to Charles F. Millsbaugh Hall of North American woods (Hall 26).

OCEAN BIRDS SHOWN

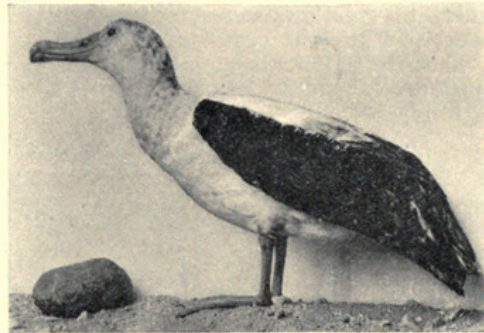
Specimens of the largest bird that flies, the most powerful of flying birds, various rare birds, and some very strange birds, are included in a new exhibit of ocean-ranging winged creatures recently placed on exhibition in Hall 21 among the systematic bird collections. The new exhibit includes twenty-seven species of loons, grebes, albatrosses, petrels, shearwaters, boobies, pelicans, tropic birds, cormorants, and frigate birds.

There is a fine specimen of the wandering albatross, an inhabitant of cold southern seas, which is the largest of all flying birds. This is the bird made famous by Coleridge in *The Ancient Mariner*. It is rivalled by another species in the exhibit, the frigate bird, which, although somewhat smaller, is rated as in many ways the most powerful bird that flies, according to Rudyerd Boulton, Assistant Curator of Birds. Frigate birds are trained by natives of islands in the South

Pacific to carry messages like homing pigeons.

Also of special interest is the flightless cormorant which is found only on the Galapagos Islands and which in consequence of its isolated habitat and lack of any necessity or inclination to travel has wings of very much reduced size, making it a parallel in development to the extinct great auk. Shown also is the species of cormorant which the Japanese train to catch and retrieve fish, a ring being placed around the bird's neck to prevent it from swallowing the fish. The late Dr. Berthold Laufer, former Curator of Anthropology, wrote a monograph on this subject issued by the Museum in the Anthropological Series of publications.

All of these sea birds are more or less primitive or of low rank in the scale of evolution, it is stated by Mr. Boulton. The exhibit was prepared by Staff Taxidermist John W. Moyer. A wide range of



The Wandering Albatross

Largest of all flying birds. This specimen is included in new exhibit of ocean-ranging birds in Hall 21.

habitats, from extreme polar to extreme tropical regions, is represented. Some of the birds were collected by Museum expeditions, among them the Rawson-MacMillan Subarctic Expedition, Cornelius Crane Pacific Expedition, Marshall Field Chilean Expedition, and the two expeditions sponsored by Mr. Leon Mandel, one to Venezuela and one to Guatemala. Other specimens were obtained through the courtesy of the Chicago Zoological Society.

EAR DEFORMATION IN AFRICA

The great aesthetic ambition in the life of a man or woman of the Akikuyu tribe in Kenya Colony, East Africa, is to make the lobes of his ears touch his shoulders. An exhibit of the devices used for this purpose is included among the African ethnological collections in Hall E.

This process of "beautification" of the ears, like many other deformations practised by primitive peoples, is begun in early childhood, when small perforations are made in the ear lobes of boys and girls. The ears are gradually extended to greater and greater length by the periodical introduction of larger and larger ornaments. Disks of wood, heavy spirals of copper wire, gourds, cane peg, and many other objects are hung from the perforated ear lobes and worn year after year. The museum collection consists of examples of the various objects thus used. Photographs of natives, taken in the field by a Museum expedition, showing how they appear with their huge ear pendants and other paraphernalia, are likewise exhibited. Also displayed are artifacts relating to other phases of the primitive life of these people.

COLLECTION OF WOODEN MODELS FROM EGYPTIAN TOMBS

How the ancient Egyptians visualized the projection of the normal activities of life on earth to the hereafter is well illustrated in a collection of wooden model groups of people and various objects of every-day use, on exhibition in Hall J. These models were buried in graves of the Old Kingdom (2500 B.C.) and the Middle Kingdom (2000 B.C.).

Starting in the Old Kingdom time with single figures of the dead themselves, their children, and their household servants, which, it was believed, would serve in another world as substitute bodies if the original mummies should perish, there developed during the Middle Kingdom a custom of placing in the tombs elaborate groups representing in part people at their household duties, and partly the ceremonies conducted for the benefit of the dead. As food was fundamental, figures representing the making of bread and beer, and showing ovens and baskets of food, were prominent.

On the religious side, many of the models represented boats transporting the dead to the tomb of Osiris at Abydos, since all of this god's subjects wished to visit him in person or in proxy. Often the actual mummies were transported to this tomb.

ANCIENT DEITIES OF MEXICO

A collection of stone statues representing various deities of the ancient aboriginal inhabitants of Mexico has been placed on exhibition in the hall of Mexican and Central American archaeology (Hall 8). Curious sidelights on the religious beliefs of the Aztecs, Toltecs, and related peoples, are reflected in the symbolism of these carvings, some of which are crudely executed, and others of which are examples of a high degree of artistic skill.

Some of the gods represented were connected with especially revolting rites of human sacrifice. There is Huehuetotl, god of fire, to whom human victims were offered by throwing them into a furnace and, just before they expired, withdrawing them, cutting the breast open with a stone knife and removing the heart. Then there was Coatlicue ("Snake Skirt"), goddess of rain, whose human victims were decapitated or flayed, and then had their skins removed to be worn as garments by priests in a ritual of rain.

One head, hollowed out to hold liquids, represents one of the gods of the "four hundred kinds of drunkenness." Mr. J. Eric Thompson, former Assistant Curator of Central and South American Archaeology, says that the ancient Mexicans used the term "four hundred" in the same sense that we use the expression "a thousand and one" in making an off-hand statement. These aboriginals delighted in innumerable ways of becoming intoxicated, and they celebrated each method by placing it under the tutelage of a separate deity.

The goddesses of maize, and other agricultural deities such as those of other crops, of the fields, and of rain, were nearest to the hearts of the Mexicans. One of the statues represents the principal one of these, Chicomecoatl ("Seven Snakes"). The Mexicans, like many other American aboriginals, linked the serpent closely with the idea of rain. Also shown are stone frogs which likewise were symbols of rain. Other deities represented include Chalchiutlicue, Aztec goddess of running water and sister of Tlaloc the rain god, and Xochipilli, the fat squatting patron of music and flowers.



1935. "Ocean Birds Shown." *Field Museum news* 6(8), 3-3.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/25720>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/350948>

Holding Institution

Field Museum of Natural History Library

Sponsored by

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the Chicago Field Museum.

For information contact dcc@library.uiuc.edu.

Rights Holder: Field Museum of Natural History

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.