

# Field Museum News

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## STORKS NESTING ON ROOF IN POLISH VILLAGE SHOWN IN NEW HABITAT GROUP

By RUDYERD BOULTON  
Curator of Birds

The Darwinian principle of Natural Selection is believed to be responsible for a great deal of the differentiation of animals into their respective species, genera, families, and so forth. The individuals best adapted to a particular environment are likely to survive because of their advantage over the misfits.

Within historic times only a very few cases are known in which the basic principle of Natural Selection has been reversed. Where this does occur, an animal deliberately selects a new artificial environment, instead of remaining in its original one, thereby avoiding slow extinction due to the restriction and shrinkage of the conditions under which it evolved.

The white stork of Europe and Asia is one of the outstanding birds in which this interesting situation is shown to good advantage. A habitat group of these birds has recently been opened in Field Museum (Hall 20). It is the gift of the Polish-American Chamber of Commerce of Warsaw, Poland, and was made possible through the cordial co-operation of the Polish Consul-General in Chicago, Dr. Wacław Gawronski, and Professor Jerzy Bojanowski, an official of the Consulate.

The group shows a scene at sunrise in a little rural community near Krzemieniec, southeastern Poland. In the foreground is the thatched roof top of a cottage supporting a stork's nest containing two young storks. One of the parents stands on the nest offering a frog to the youngsters. The other parent solemnly stands near-by—sentinel-like. In the painted background are a number of cottages, one of which supports an additional stork's nest, and a church of the Greek Orthodox faith with its characteristic steeple and Byzantine cupola. The rising sun, a

golden half-disk on the horizon, casts a rosy glow over the scene. Although no people are about because of the early hour, wisps of smoke from the cottage chimneys forecast the day's activity. In the distant background are meadows and fields of grain, for in this part of Poland the farmers of a district gather together in little communities, the cottages being placed close together for companionship, while the tilled fields surround the

Perhaps the best known legend about storks is the one that is told to little children regarding the arrival of human babies. The origin of this story is shrouded in the mists of early history, but even in countries like England and the United States, where storks do not occur, it is the time-honored explanation of additions to a family. Another widespread story is that storks hold court and pass judgment on the actions of members

of the stork community, punishing and even executing individuals who do not conform to standards of stork morality. Were it not for the universal and widespread interest in storks they undoubtedly never would have deserted their natural nesting sites on cliffs and trees to adopt the habitations of human beings. Now having done that, they are practically dependent on humans for their existence, and a sudden change of popular opinion would work a great hardship on them.

In the United States three species of birds have adopted the ways of humans, as storks have in Europe. Curiously enough, they are all birds that gather their food from the air and rarely descend to the ground. The chimney swift formerly nested in hollow trees, but nowadays it

is an event to find one in such a natural situation, for they almost always nest in unused chimneys or deserted barns. Likewise, the barn swallow now normally nests on the beams and rafters of barns or in boat houses, while the purple martin, more common in urban communities than in the country, nests almost exclusively in "cottages" and "castles" especially built for it by interested persons.

The taxidermy and accessories of the stork group are by Staff Taxidermist John W. Moyer, assisted by Mr. John La Bonté. The background is by Mr. Arthur G. Rueckert.



European Storks in Roof Top Home

New habitat group in the Hall of Birds showing scene in a Polish village. The stork specimens and the nest, together with the actual roof top on which it was built, are a gift to the Museum from the Polish-American Chamber of Commerce in Warsaw. The birds were prepared by Staff Taxidermist John W. Moyer, and the background was painted by Mr. Arthur G. Rueckert.

village. At one side of a winding road is a shrine, without which no Polish village would be complete.

For centuries the stork has been celebrated in song, story and legend in Europe. As a result, storks are universally protected, not only by laws, but by tradition and popular opinion. It is regarded as a good omen throughout central Europe to have a stork's nest on one's house. In many communities the householders go to the extent of placing an old wagon-wheel on the roof, hoping to attract the storks by providing a firm foundation for a nest.

parts, rather than by complicating the structure. Some of man's early fish-like ancestors, now extinct and known only by their fossil remains, had as many as 160 bones in their skulls, states Mr. D. Dwight Davis, Assistant Curator of Vertebrate Skeletons, who was responsible for preparation of the new exhibit. The number has been slowly reduced through the ages, although not always with complete consistency. The reduction is not necessarily greatest according to whether an animal is

in a lower or higher classification—birds, for example, have fewer bones in their skulls than man has. The tendency in general, however, has been toward structural simplification of the skull as evolution progresses.

Also shown in the exhibit are the skulls of a frog (31 bones), a lizard (52 bones), a bird (11 bones), and a muskrat (34 bones). In preparation are further exhibits illustrating other phases in the history of the development of the human skull.

### EVOLUTION OF HUMAN SKULL

The component parts of a human skull, numbering 20 bones, are compared with those of a codfish, numbering 68, in a new exhibit pertaining to evolution, installed in Hall 19 of the Department of Zoology.

The two skulls have been disarticulated, or separated into all their parts, and mounted on screens, side by side. Thus is graphically illustrated the fact that, in animal bodies, as in well-designed machinery, efficiency is often increased by reducing the number of





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