

STRAW HATS

In Europe the history of what is known as the "straw hat" dates back to the early seventeenth century when hats were made from wheat straw in Bedfordshire, England. In Italy the "Leghorn hat" was a well-known article of manufacture in Tuscany about the middle of the same century. In addition to types of wheat straw hats, there is on display in Hall 28 of the Department of Botany at Field Museum an exhibit showing steps in the manufacture of the so-called Panama hat (actually made principally in Ecuador), and also some distinctive hats from Alaska, Brazil, the Philippine Islands, China, and India, made from materials, such as split palm leaves, rushes or grasses, and stems of reeds.



The First Step in Making a Panama Hat—

—is to grow a Panama hat palm (*Carludovica palmata*). This plant is native to Central America and northern South America, especially Ecuador and certain parts of Peru. The reproduction shown above is on exhibition in Field Museum's Hall of Plant Life (Hall 29).

ARABIAN METEORITE CONVERTED DESERT SANDS INTO GLASS

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Of more than ordinary interest are two small meteorite specimens and a large piece of silica glass recently added to Field Museum's meteorite collection in Hall 34. This material was presented by Mr. William Lenahan, of the California Arabian Standard Oil Company, Jidda, Arabia, and represents an unusually spectacular meteorite fall.

In February, 1932, Mr. H. St. John Philby, noted British explorer, discovered at Wabar, which is in the heart of the Arabian (or Rub'al Khali) Desert, a group of craters formed by the impact of an enormous meteorite. This impact had been so violent that it generated intense heat which melted and even vaporized part of the sand upon which it struck. Vapors were generated so suddenly and in such quantity that severe explosions were produced blowing out five craters, the largest about one hundred yards in diameter. Specimens of the meteorite and of the silica glass formed from the

melted and vaporized sand were collected by Mr. Philby and sent to the British Museum in London, where they have been thoroughly studied.

Wabar is in such an inaccessible region of the desert that it was not again visited until 1937, when a geologist of the California Arabian company succeeded in reaching the place. He collected there the meteorite specimens and silica glass which now appear in Field Museum's exhibit.

The meteorite specimens resemble other iron meteorites of like size, and the silica glass, as might be expected from its origin, has the general appearance of a furnace slag, or of any rock which has been melted and suddenly cooled. Its unique nature is perceived only on the closest inspection, and its most remarkable feature can be seen only under the microscope. The stony semi-opaque glass is filled with a multitude of minute bright globules of iron, a thousandth of an inch and less in diameter. This can only mean that the heat generated by the impact of the meteorite was so great that part of the iron meteorite boiled off as iron vapor and mingled with the vapor given off by boiling silica from the sand, while the silica vapor, shielding the iron, prevented its burning. As the mixed vapors cooled they condensed into a rain or mist of iron and silica which formed the silica glass.

FIELD MUSEUM'S QUETZAL GROUP APPEARS IN BRITISH WEEKLY

A beautiful full-page reproduction, in colors, of Field Museum's habitat group of the quetzal, national bird of Guatemala, appeared in the March 25 issue of *The Illustrated London News*, one of Great Britain's most important periodicals. The illustration was made from a natural-color photograph taken by Mr. Clarence B. Mitchell, Research Associate in Photography on the Museum staff.

Publication of a picture in these dimensions, and in full colors, by a magazine exercising the superior type of editorial discrimination characteristic of *The Illustrated London News*, can be accepted as a tribute to the skill and artistry both of the photographer, and of the taxidermist and artists responsible for the preparation of the group—Mr. John W. Moyer, who mounted the birds, Mr. Arthur G. Rueckert who painted the background, and Mr. Frank Letl who prepared the plant accessories for the foreground. The birds in the group were collected by Assistant Curator Emmet R. Blake as a member of an expedition sponsored by Mr. Leon Mandel.

A small reproduction, in colors, of this group appeared in the December, 1938 issue of *FIELD MUSEUM NEWS*. Colored post cards of it are available at The Book Shop of the Museum.

The making of flour is illustrated by a miniature mill on exhibition in Hall 25.

THINGS YOU MAY HAVE MISSED

The Least Weasel

Ounce for ounce, with the possible exception of the shrews, the tiny least weasel is the most ferocious and bloodthirsty animal of the mammalian class. Only a fraction over six inches in length, and weighing on an average about one-third of a pound, it is distinguished from the other weasels by its extremely small size and almost total lack of the characteristic black tip to the tail. With its long flattened head, wide jaws, and peculiar looping gait when scenting a trail, it gives a definite impression of resemblance to a reptile. There is a tense readiness about it, comparable to a coiled spring held precariously in leash.

The least weasel is reddish-brown above, and white beneath. In common with other weasels, it possesses the ability to change to a white coat in winter, which must give it an enormous advantage over the mice and birds upon which it preys. In fact, it is only in the light of the almost unbelievable fertility of its victims that one can conceive of their continued existence, for all weasels are known to attack out of mere lust for killing. However, this is apparently part of Nature's scheme of checks and balances, and the conduct of weasels should not be judged by human moral standards. On the credit side are an enormous number of insects and rodent pests destroyed by this small predator, thus making it decidedly beneficial to man's interests.

The four North American subspecies of this highly successful little carnivore range from Alaska to Hudson Bay, and southward to Montana, Minnesota, Indiana, and Pennsylvania; but in addition the species has recently been shown to be represented by Old World races, making it circumpolar in range. Nevertheless, despite this wide radiation, it is rarely taken in traps and little is known of its habits. The nest, usually grass-lined, is in a hole in a bank. Four to six young are born in a litter.

A specimen of least weasel is shown among the fur-bearing animals in the systematic collection of mammals (Hall 15).—W.J.B.



Tiny Killer

The least weasel, which many zoologists describe as, ounce for ounce, "the most bloodthirsty of mammals." The illustration is approximately one-quarter life size.



1939. "Field Museum's Quetzal Group Appears in British Weekly." *Field Museum news* 10(6), 3-3.

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