

## NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS

*(A Review of Recent Developments)*

BY WILFRED H. OSGOOD

CHIEF CURATOR, DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGY

*(Editor's Note:—The following article, written by Dr. Osgood at the request of the Editors of THE 1939 BRITANNICA BOOK OF THE YEAR, is reprinted here by special permission of the publishers—Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. It concisely tells the principal developments of the past year in the museums of the world.)*

Evidence continues to accumulate indicating that natural history museums are changing their ways. There have been museums or collections of natural objects for centuries, but it is only in the last few decades that they have attained a new status and changed more than in all their previous history. In municipalities, states, and nations their importance, amounting almost to indispensability, is everywhere being recognized. In 1938 the British Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries made sweeping recommendations for new museums and extensive additions to existing ones in the South Kensington district in London. Significant, also, was the establishment in Argentina by executive decree of a national "Commission on Museums and Historic Sites." Such commissions already exist in many other countries.

## MANY NEW MUSEUMS OPENED

The multiplication of small municipal and park museums has continued. In the United States there are now forty-five museums in national parks, representing an investment of \$1,300,000 and serving 1,500,000 visitors annually. Louisiana proposes "to establish an appropriate historical or natural history museum within each state park." Other states have already gone far in the same direction. A new specialization in the museum field is a psychology museum opened in Chicago. This so-called "museum movement" is practically world-wide. In the British Isles it is stated that new museums have been opened at the rate of one every three weeks for the past ten years. One student, investigating museum methods in 1938, visited no less than 300 museums of various kinds in the British Isles. In the United States, in addition to the large privately endowed institutions, there are now twenty-three independent state museums. In Canada there are thirty-six museums with full-time staffs. Even in newly organized Manchuria there are at least six museums of some importance, and Soviet Russia has more than seven hundred of all classes.

In Russia, the aim of many governmentally supervised museums is plainly adult education for the masses. Exhibits are shown without glass fronts, and visitors are encouraged to handle many of the objects. The same aim is the fundamental one in nearly all museums elsewhere.

Entertainment is still a great function but the tendency is to combine it with service. This is seen not only in organized work with schools, colleges, and other cohesive groups, but also in didactic exhibits and in general public relations ranging from docent services to national radio broadcasts. The modern demand is for exhibits that are thought-provoking or definitely instructive as well as those that inspire wonder and admiration. The habitat group, which has been especially developed in America, continues to be popular both for its colorful art and its subtle didacticism. During 1938, six large habitat groups were completed by the American Museum of Natural History in New York. In Chicago, at Field Museum, seven new groups of large size also were opened. In museums with smaller resources, some large groups are still being made, but the small diorama, which serves many of the same purposes, is receiving much attention.

In the United States, many museums have been stimulated to put their houses in order and to undertake long postponed projects through assistance received from personnel supplied by the federal unemployment relief agencies. In this way, in 1937, services from a total of 2,774 additional employees were obtained by museums throughout the country. In 1938, the number was slightly increased and much valuable work was accomplished.

The movement for the training of museum workers to meet the requirements of modern specialization is gaining headway both in the United States and Great Britain. The Buffalo Museum has regular organized courses for students intending to pursue museum work and a system of "internes" closely comparable to that so well established in medical education. Several other museums provide similar service, and the National Museum of Wales accepts students on a three-year basis for work in special branches of science. The British Museums Association, through its Education Committee, offers a diploma for students of museology, which is thus becoming an organized profession. The Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees continued their policy of promoting inter-museum travel. During the year seven grants were made, each essentially a traveling fellowship.

## MEASURES FOR SAFETY IN WAR

The violent "war scare" in 1938 was of considerable concern to museums, especially in England. Hasty preparations were made for the removal of special museum treasures from the large cities to places in the country offering comparative safety. Not much could be done in the limited time available and it was obvious that immediate bombing might have produced much irreparable destruction. The result has been the formation of more definite plans for the permanent removal of much material (especially that

having a basic relation to research) to new quarters. It is not unlikely that the future will see the research of museums conducted in the quiet and relative safety of the country while the exhibits, many of them replicas, and the popular education will remain in the city.

## WORLD-WIDE EXPEDITIONS

Museum expeditions during the year have been numerous and world-wide, but mostly financed through private sources since museums, like other endowed institutions, find their income from fixed endowment curtailed by prevailing low interest rates. In number and importance of expeditions, the American Museum of New York easily stands first with parties working in New Guinea, Venezuela, Burma, South Africa, and many parts of North America. Field Museum of Chicago worked in British Guiana, Guatemala, Canada and the United States. The Philadelphia Academy of Sciences reports no less than eighteen expeditions of varying importance.

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## Raymond Foundation "Followup" to School Radio Program

The Museum's last "radio followup" meeting of the present school year was given in the Lecture Hall by the James Nelson and Anna Louise Raymond Foundation on May 4, in conjunction with a science program of the Public School Broadcasting Council. The subject was "Spring Wild Flowers." Colored slides of flowers both common and rare in the Chicago region were shown, and special attention was called to those protected by state laws. After the talk, herbarium sheets, from the Department of Botany, were exhibited, and the steps necessary in collecting, cutting, and mounting plants were explained. The meeting was attended by 129 representatives chosen by eighth grade science classes.

## Reported Nest of Fossil Eggs Found to Be Not Genuine

Fossil eggs are known from various localities, but up to the present no genuine fossil birds' eggs have been recovered in Illinois, according to Mr. Elmer S. Riggs, Curator of Paleontology. A recent newspaper report of the discovery of a nest of fossil eggs in DeKalb County, Illinois, was investigated by Mr. Riggs and Assistant Curator Bryan Patterson, who visited the locality on May 17 and examined eleven of the supposed egg specimens. Three of these were brought back to Field Museum and subjected to microscopic examination and to chemical tests. It was found that the "eggs" were artificial, some of them being composed of lime and sand cast in a mold, and others composed of portland cement and sand.



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