ZOOLOGIST EDMUND HELLER DIES ON WEST COAST

Mr. Edmund Heller, formerly a member of Field Museum's staff and active in the conduct of various zoological expeditions for this institution, died in San Francisco July 18, at the age of 64. Mr. Heller had a long and distinguished career as a naturalist and traveler. When quite a young man, he was employed by the Museum as zoological collector and was in the field continuously from 1901 to 1905, working in the western United States and Mexico. In the fall of 1905 he went with Carl Akeley to British East Africa (now Kenya Colony) and made an important collection of the small mammals of the region, including the types of many new species and a number of rare animals not previously represented in American museums.

In 1909 he was selected as one of the naturalists to accompany former President Theodore Roosevelt on his famous expedition to Africa for the Smithsonian Institution. On this trip he was conspicuously successful and, on returning, devoted considerable time to the preparation of his share, which was a large one, of the great two-volume work, *Life Histories of African Game Animals*, by Roosevelt and Heller. This was his most important publication; numerous shorter papers, however, also appeared under his capable authorship.

At various times he was connected with the United States Biological Survey, the Smithsonian Institution, the American Museum of Natural History, and the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology of the University of California. During the war, he accompanied Mr. Paul Rainey to Asia on work connected with the federal Intelligence Service. In 1921, he again joined the staff of Field Museum and, in 1922–23, conducted a lengthy expedition in Peru. In 1924–26, he worked in central Africa for the Museum and, in 1927, he left to become Director of the Washington Park Zoo at Milwaukee. Some years later he went to San Francisco as Director of the Fleishhacker Zoo in Golden Gate Park, the position he held at the time of his death.

In number of specimens collected, and in the breadth and variety of the field covered, Heller must be ranked as one of the greatest zoological collectors of all time. Of mammals alone, nearly 9,000 of his specimens are in Field Museum, and practically all other large American institutions also have large numbers. —W. H. O.

Ferns Used as Food

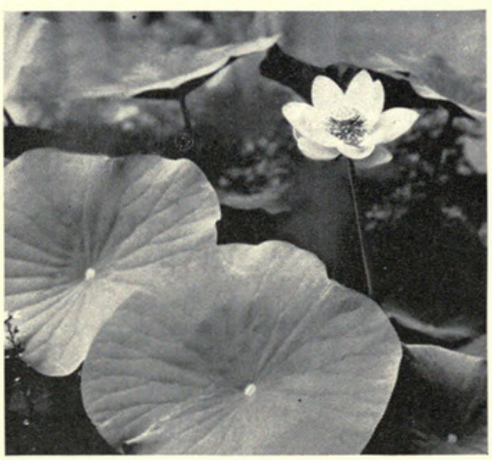
Ferns, which are generally considered only as ornamental plants, are important as food producing plants in some countries, particularly in New Zealand, Australia, and islands of the Pacific. The underground stem, or rhizome, of the bracken contains a quantity of mucilage and starch. In some parts of Europe it is prepared by pounding, washing, and then mixing it with meal to make bread in time of scarcity. With the introduction of corn and potatoes, however, this practice is becoming discarded.

PLANTS FROM ANCIENT SEEDS IN FULL FLOWER

In the May, 1938, issue of FIELD MUSEUM NEWS there appeared an account of the germination, in the Department of Botany at Field Museum, of some seeds of pink lotus of the Orient (*Nelumbium Nelumbo*) estimated to be 300 to 500 years old. Within a few weeks one of these ancient seeds developed a shoot seven and a half inches in length, at which time it was transferred to the Garfield Park Conservatory for growing.

There, in the care of Mr. August Koch, Chief Horticulturist of the Conservatory, the lotus plant continued to grow and last year within a few months of its germination it produced a number of small floating leaves. After passing the winter in storage its growth was resumed in the spring of this year. Floating leaves were again produced. Then there appeared the erect leaves characteristic of the lotus, and, in the middle of summer, several of the large pink flowers of the species followed in close succession.

The plant, believed to represent the longest duration of delayed germination on record, is now on public view at the Conservatory of Garfield Park where it forms a unique exhibit.



Plant from Centuries-old Seed

Pink lotus of the Orient, in full bloom at Garfield Park Conservatory a little more than a year after its germination in the botanical laboratories at Field Museum from seeds estimated to be three to five hundred years old. It is believed to represent the longest instance on record of such delayed flowering.

Flax is Oldest Textile Plant

Common flax (*Linum usitatissimum L.*), is first on the list of textile plants, as the one of which we have the oldest historic record. It formed both the garments and grave clothes of the inhabitants of ancient Egypt. The cere-cloth which envelops Egyptian mummies consists of fiber of flax.

A PROJECT TO IMPROVE BIRD COLLECTIONS

The magnificent systematic series of mounted North American birds exhibited in Hall 21 is being still further amplified and improved by the inclusion of freshly collected nesting and natural habitat accessories which give more lifelike results.

Numbering more than a thousand specimens arranged systematically to reveal family relationships, the exhibit includes most of the species and better known geographical races of birds occurring north of Mexico. Discarding, as unimaginative and obsolete, the well-known "T" type of perch often used by museums, every specimen is mounted upon a branch, rock, tussock, or other natural element suggestive of the birds' environment.

The additions now being made carry the illusion still further and when complete will include actual nests and eggs of many common species. Planned as a long-time project which may continue several seasons, the actual collecting of specimens and accessories is under way in a series of week-end field trips by Mr. Frank H. Letl, Preparator of Accessories, and Mr. Emmet R. Blake, Assistant Curator of Birds.

Floyd T. Smith, Collector, is Dead

Members of the Museum's Department of Zoology were saddened by news of the recent death of Mr. Floyd T. Smith, of New York, noted Asiatic explorer. Mr. Smith was leader of the Marshall Field Zoological Expedition to China for Field Museum in 1931, and at various times conducted other important field work for this institution. The 1931 expedition in particular was highly successful, resulting in the acquisition of several thousand specimens of mammals, birds, fishes, reptiles, and amphibians. The beautiful habitat group of the rare Asiatic takin in William V. Kelley Hall (Hall 17) is composed of specimens collected by Mr. Smith.