

Chicago Natural History Museum

FOUNDED BY MARSHALL FIELD, 1893

Roosevelt Road and Lake Shore Drive, Chicago

TELEPHONE: WABASH 9410

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Members are requested to inform the Museum promptly of changes of address.

Nature in Action

ALBINOS

By EDWIN WAY TEALE

In a glass case at the Chicago Natural History Museum, after my lecture [Mr. Teale lectured here last March 23] I was shown a remarkable exhibit of albino birds and animals. There I saw a bluejay that wasn't blue, a brown thrasher that wasn't brown, a crow that wasn't black. All were snow white. There I saw a pure white English sparrow. Even its bill was the color of white-wash. There I saw a flicker, completely white except for a startling blood red crescent on the back of its head. And there, also, I saw an albino woodchuck and an opossum and a skunk that had fur as white as that of an ermine.

In every instance the creature had lacked the ability to produce pigments within its system to a more or less marked degree. There are albinos among plants as well as among animals. Snow-white lobsters, frogs, peacocks, cattle have been reported. Among humans, it is estimated that the frequency of the occurrence of albinism is about one in 10,000. The highest rate of frequency is said to be found among the Indians of Arizona and Mexico. The reason the eyes of albinos are pink is that the red blood circulating through the back of the eye is seen through the transparent tissues in front.

Among wild creatures, albinos often have an unearthly beauty. Unfortunately, it is also often a fatal beauty. Hawks and other predators see them more easily. They lack the camouflage that saves the lives of normally colored birds and animals. Their strange beauty is also a kind of curse that ostracizes them from their kind. A flock of birds will sometimes set upon an albino or a partial albino member of the group and drive it away. Such birds usually have difficulty in finding mates.

A few years ago, a redwing blackbird appeared in a swamp with which I am familiar. Almost half the feathers of one wing were white. It was a marked bird. I used to see it calling from the top of a weeping willow tree, engaging in aerial battles with other males for the defense of its territory, darting after crows or herons that flew too close. It stood out among the other birds for its dash and vitality and courage as well as for its half white wing. Yet it never seemed to get a mate. Before the summer was over, it disappeared. I never saw it again.

(The above is a syndicated article of The George Matthew Adams Service, reproduced by permission of the author.)

MUSEUM OFFICERS RE-ELECTED

Mr. Stanley Field was re-elected President of Chicago Natural History Museum for his thirty-ninth consecutive one-year term, at the Annual Meeting of the institution's Board of Trustees, held January 20.

All other officers who served in 1946 were re-elected. They are: Mr. Marshall Field, Chicago publisher, First Vice-President; Mr. Albert B. Dick, Jr., Second Vice-President; Mr. Samuel Insull, Jr., Third Vice-President; Colonel Clifford C. Gregg, Director and Secretary; Mr. Solomon A. Smith, Treasurer, and Mr. John R. Millar, Assistant Secretary.

1946 ATTENDANCE UP

The counters in the hands of the entrance guards at the Museum clicked for 1,287,436 visitors during 1946. This was a large increase over attendance in 1945 when the number of visitors was 1,070,678. It is believed attendance would have been considerably larger had it not been for the two coal strike dimouts which reduced Museum visiting hours temporarily, and for the prolonged bus strike which cut off the transportation facilities of many potential Museum visitors.

Only 127,305, or less than 10 per cent of the total, paid admission; more than 90 per cent came on the free days, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays, or belonged to classifications admitted free every day—Museum members, children, teachers, students, and military personnel in uniform.

Books

(All books reviewed in the BULLETIN are available in The Book Shop of the Museum. Mail orders accompanied by remittance are promptly filled—The Book Shop pays the postage on shipments.)

A Naturalist in Cuba. By Thomas Barbour. Little, Brown, and Co., Boston. \$3.

The late Dr. Barbour's host of friends rejoice in the memorial of his naturalist's life left in his volumes of reminiscence and travel. He dedicated his book on Cuba specifically as a tribute to commemorate his friendship and admiration for the naturalists of that island. It forms also a most satisfactory memorial record of a lifelong love of an island.

The generous stack of papers on the West Indian fauna that came to my own desk as a gift from Dr. Barbour thirty years ago introduced me at once to the charm of the West Indies, and to the stimulus provided by one's personal library for a field of specialization.

The personal tone of Dr. Barbour's book, and the constant reference to the background of personalities that forms so pervasive an aura of interest to the other practitioners of descriptive zoology, is peculiarly sympathetic. He had a vast fund of anecdote about the development of the important Harvard Botanical Station, about the bird collecting that accumulated the great collection in the Museum of Comparative Zoology, about the fascinating anoles and snakes and froglets and shield-headed toads, about the mammals, both living and extinct, and about the adventures of cave hunting.

A Naturalist in Cuba thus happily combines the interest of naturalist and historian, and forms a thoroughly satisfactory introduction to the plant and animal life of Cuba, to the problems of island life, and to the great tropical island to which citizens of the United States are perhaps even more closely and multifariously tied than to our own island outposts in the Caribbean.

KARL P. SCHMIDT, *Chief Curator, Zoology, and Associate Editor of Copeia.*

Technical Publications Issued

The following technical publications were issued by Chicago Natural History Museum Press recently:

Fieldiana—Anthropology, Vol. 36, No. 2. *Toggle Harpoon Heads from the Aleutian Islands.* By George I. Quimby. December 31, 1946. 9 pages, 9 text figures. \$0.35.

Zoological Series, Vol. 25, Part 3. *A Bibliography of Birds.* By Reuben Myron Strong. December 24, 1946. 528 pages.



Teale, Edwin Way. 1947. "Albinos." *Bulletin* 18(2), 6–6.

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