

Chicago Natural History Museum

FOUNDED BY MARSHALL FIELD, 1893

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

RANK-AND-FILE BIRDS DOMINATE RESEARCH

The occasional discovery of species new to science adds zest to the museum researcher's work, but more frequently his enthusiasm is jogged when least expected by less spectacular though often more important discoveries. For an ornithologist, it may be the receipt of specimens in a phase of plumage either proving or disproving the existence of a previously described form. Sometimes a single specimen collected far beyond the known range of its kind opens up unexplored avenues of research that may lead to an entirely new concept of its relationships. And not infrequently the routine process of studying a general collection in the course of its identification discloses bits of information that collectively add much to our knowledge of the bird life of a region.

A MEXICAN COLLECTION

Such was the case with a collection of 342 birds from the state of Guerrero, in southwestern Mexico, which is the basis of a report soon to be published by the Museum. Since the birds of Guerrero have received the attention of competent investigators for many years past, this small collection was at first regarded merely as a desirable though not particularly interesting addition to the Museum's representation of Mexican bird life. Methodical identification of the 109 species and geographical varieties in the collection revealed none

new to science, but interest quickened when it was found that fifteen of the birds had not previously been reported from the Mexican state of Guerrero.

Nine of these were migrants. They serve to emphasize both the need for continued field work in southwestern Mexico and the extent to which various races of North American species are brought together in winter by the funneling effect of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. An interesting by-product of this study was the accumulation of data suggesting that the pre-breeding activity of female reproductive organs lags far behind that of males in spring but finally undergoes much more rapid development. Clues to an explanation of the phenomenon of migration may eventually be found in the refinement and elaboration of similar correlations between physiological development and various aspects of the seasonal cycle.

BEARING ON EVOLUTION

Collections from areas inhabited by intermediate populations, or birds that combine the characters of two or more related varieties, are of special interest to the zoogeographer and student of evolution. The Guerrero collection repeatedly reflected the influence of elements from the diverse Mexican faunas and those of Central America. For example, analysis of the range and affinities of Godman's Euphonia, a colorful little tanager never before reported in Guerrero, shows that it is intermediate between the white-vented and Lesson's Euphonia and that it is actually a geographical variant or sub-species of the latter rather than a distinct species, as has been supposed since its discovery in 1889.

A study of Guerrero roadrunners produced evidence, by inference, that an intermediate population exists in the adjacent state of Oaxaca. Similarly, two distinct races of burrowing owls, and those of several other species, were found to merge in Guerrero, resulting in a population that can be allocated to either race with equal justification. Information such as this—which increases our understanding of bird distribution and genealogy, the extent of individual variation and modification of populations by related forms—attracts no headlines but is one of the more important products of museum research.

EMMET R. BLAKE

Associate Curator of Birds

Gift to Museum Library

The Library of the Museum has received a collection of several hundred books, pamphlets, and periodicals on entomology, as a gift from the family of the late Charles V. Riley, through his daughter, Miss Thora Riley, of Washington, D.C. Mr. Riley died in 1895. The collection has a high historical value and makes a notable addition to the resources of the Library.

STAFF NOTES

Mr. Miguel Covarrubias, one of Mexico's most noted artists, who is also an ethnologist and archaeologist of note, has been elected to the staff of the Department of Anthropology as Research Associate in Primitive Art. Mr. Covarrubias recently was in Chicago and spent considerable time in conference and studies with members of the Museum department. In addition to his other accomplishments he is especially well-known as an expert in primitive art, and as a writer and teacher. . . . Mrs. Dorothy Foss of the Department of Zoology has been promoted from Assistant, Division of Anatomy, to Osteologist. . . . Mr. John W. Moyer, Chief of the Division of Motion Pictures, is the contributor of the illustrated article on taxidermy in the recent new edition of the *Encyclopedia Americana*, and is a contributor also to the latest edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and the *Britannica Junior*. The articles are illustrated with photographs taken in this Museum. . . . Mr. Clifford H. Pope, Curator of Reptiles, reports favorable conditions for salamander studies at Mountain Lake, Virginia, the summer station of the University of Virginia. He is actively engaged in examination of salamander distribution as governed by altitude in drainage systems in this region. . . . Dr. Sharat K. Roy, Chief Curator of Geology, and Mr. Arthur G. Rueckert, Staff Artist, made a survey of eastern museums in connection with projects for the Department of Geology.

CHAMELEONS—

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learning period. At their first feeding attempt, the babies were able to project the sticky tongue a full inch and a quarter, a greater distance than their body length, and hit the target accurately. Small spiders, flies and tiny insect larvae form their present diet.

Preparations are being made for more such broods, from several other expectant female chameleons.

Viviparous production of young is well-known in several species of chameleons in temperate South Africa, and is reported for montane species in East Africa, presumably for the very species in question. Most chameleons, however, lay eggs, depositing them in excavations in the soil. Needless to say, the production of tiny replica chameleons adds to the combination of fascinating interest and charm of the first Chicago chameleon colony.

Brief survey tours of the Museum, suited to a visit of one or two hours but possible in thirty minutes for those who have to skim through in a hurry, are outlined, with charts, in the latest Museum General Guide.



Reynoso, Alvaro. 1948. "Rank-And-File Birds Dominate Research." *Bulletin* 19(8), 6–6.

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