

New Definition of News . . .

FISH EATS BIRD!

By AUSTIN L. RAND
CURATOR OF BIRDS

IT HAS BECOME commonplace to hear about birds eating fish. The government gets out reports on the relation of fish-eating birds to fish hatcheries. The cries of commercial fisheries have caused inquiries to be instituted into the food of cormorants that were supposed to be eating the fish before they grew up enough for us to eat. The scarcity of salmon on some of our northeastern streams has caused the allocation of biologists to study the effect of kingfishers and mergansers on salmon fry and fingerlings.

But fishes get back some of their own by eating birds. The facts fit the old "man-



bites-dog" definition of news but are probably not widely known.

To one who has fished for large-mouth black bass amongst the cypress trees and bonnets of water hyacinth and has seen these bass strike savagely at surface lures as soon as they hit the surface, it comes as no surprise to find that bass strike at and catch such birds as Maryland yellow-throats that flutter across the water close to the surface.

Young ducks, too, are good game to the large-mouth, and probably many a young duck finds its way into the maw of a bass. On a pond where bass had taken many young ducks, a fisherman made a floating model of a mother duck, powered it with a motor and propeller, and attached to it by lines of various lengths several floating models of downy ducklings. In each duckling was concealed a hook. The whole flotilla was set afloat and drifted across the pond. Mother steamed ahead, with young following. Soon the bass, used to a duck diet, began to grab the ducklings. When the model was retrieved several prize bass had been taken.

In northern waters, where northern pike or jack-fish, as they're called in the north, abound in duck-nesting waters, pike are

accused of eating so many ducklings as to affect the survival of the broods. Many a marshland traveler has reported young ducks and young grebes diving, to be seen no more, and has blamed the pike. Sometimes perhaps the young bird has simply come up unobserved, but enough pike's stomachs have proved to have young ducks in them to demonstrate that pike do eat ducklings. Strangely enough, pike in some areas eat many ducklings but in others they do not eat them. The muskellunge, as might be expected from its large size, is also supposed to feed on ducklings.

But it's not alone young birds, or small birds, that are eaten by fishes. A 24-inch bass is recorded as having been caught while it still had the legs of a full-grown coot projecting from its mouth. From beak to tip of its outstretched legs the coot measured 17 inches and it weighed one pound and a quarter. Angler fish, weighing between 40 and 50 pounds, have been found to have eaten birds. One had the band from a Manx shearwater in its stomach, and another had an adult American merganser.

Birds of tropical and subtropical seas have been examined that, from scars on their legs, evidently had been attacked by a fish and seized by the feet but were able to escape. A white-winged black tern off Corsica has been seen to disappear under water, presumably dragged under by a fish.

MUSEUM EXPEDITIONS FOR 1953 LISTED

The 1953 program of expeditions and field work for members of the Museum's scientific staff (and some associates not on the regular staff) has been announced by Colonel Clifford C. Gregg, Director. Collecting assignments will be carried on both in foreign lands and the United States by sixteen individuals or groups of workers.

The largest undertaking will be the 19th season of operations, from about May to October, of the Museum's Southwest Archaeological Expedition led by Dr. Paul S. Martin, Chief Curator of Anthropology. Dr. Martin will be accompanied by other members of the staff, students from universities, and local labor recruited to assist on the "dig" of prehistoric Indian culture sites in the mountainous region near Reserve, New Mexico. This project involves collecting artifacts of peoples who populated the area as far back as 3,500 years ago and reconstruction of their history.

'LOST WORLD' EXPLORATION

The little-known "lost-world" area of Venezuela will be botanically explored by Dr. Julian A. Steyermark, Curator of the Phanerogamic Herbarium, scheduled to leave early in the year. He will be accompanied by Charles Griffin, a Missouri naturalist.

Dr. Austin L. Rand, Curator of Birds, will go to the Philippines in the autumn on an ornithological expedition. Celestino Kalinowski of the Museum taxidermy staff, will collect mammals, birds, and reptiles in Peru, beginning in April. Cruising aboard a 37-foot auxiliary schooner, an expedition will collect fishes along the coasts of Central America and the West Indies. This expedition will be conducted by Donald Erdman, ichthyologist retired from the U. S. National Museum, Washington, D.C. Mr. Erdman, now a resident of Costa Rica, is owner of the cruiser.

There are four expeditions to Mexico. Clifford H. Pope, Curator of Amphibians and Reptiles, will leave early in the year to collect and study salamanders in mountains of the Mexican state of Sonora and also in California. Dr. Sharat K. Roy, Chief Curator of Geology, left in January for a further study of Mexico's famous Parícutin volcano, which is now dormant. Emmet R. Blake, Associate Curator of Birds, will go to Mexico in the spring for an ornithological survey. Late in the year Loren P. Woods, Curator of Fishes, will collect marine life of the west coast of Mexico, centering on the Acapulco area.

FOSSIL-PLANT SURVEY

Dr. Theodor Just, Chief Curator of Botany, will explore parts of the eastern United States from Virginia northward in search of fossil plants of Triassic age (about 185 million years ago). Emil Sella, Curator of Exhibits in the Department of Botany, will spend June and July in Tennessee and North Carolina collecting material for the Museum's Hall of Plant Life.

Dr. Robert H. Denison, Curator of Fossil Fishes, will collect in important fields of Pennsylvania. Dr. Rainer Zangerl, Curator of Fossil Reptiles, will investigate ecological conditions that produced rich fossil deposits in certain parts of Indiana. Eugene S. Richardson, Jr., Curator of Fossil Invertebrates, and George Langford, Curator of Fossil Plants, will collect in Illinois, Indiana, and adjoining territory.

Henry S. Dybas, Associate Curator of Insects, will make three seasonal trips (spring, summer, and autumn) to collect insects and observe prevalence conditions in various areas of the southern Mississippi Valley and the Middle West. Dr. Fritz Haas, Curator of Lower Invertebrates, will collect on the coasts of Oregon and Washington.

In addition to expeditions, Dr. Karl P. Schmidt, Chief Curator of Zoology, will represent the Museum at the International Zoological Congress in Copenhagen, Denmark, and Curator Rand will represent the Museum at the Eighth Pacific Science Congress in Manila. Robert K. Wyant, Curator of Economic Geology, and Chief Curator Roy will go to Washington, D.C., to undertake special research on meteorites.



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