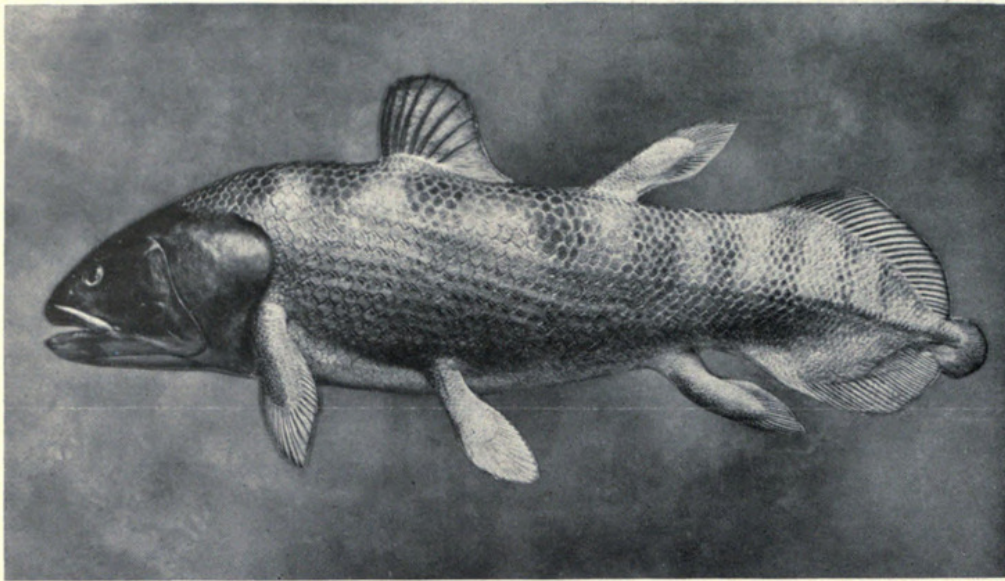


COELACANTH, 'FRONT PAGE FISH,' IS IN MUSEUM

The newspapers recently have had numerous accounts, some rating even prominent space on front pages, about a little-known species of fish that the South

of this important early stock of fishes have all been based on fossilized skeletal remains. To have a near-relative available for study of the soft anatomy is great good fortune.



NEWS SPOTLIGHT FOCUSES ON MUSEUM EXHIBIT

Model on exhibition in Hall of Fishes (Hall O) represents *Latimeria chalumnae*, an example of a 350-million-year-old type of fishes still living in the seas. The fish is a member of the family Coelacanthidae. The Coelacanth was believed to have been extinct since Cretaceous time (75 million years ago) until the recent acquisition of a specimen by Professor J. L. B. Smith, South African ichthyologist, with a consequent big "splash" on front pages the world over. The Museum model of *Latimeria* is based on photographs and description published by Professor Smith, who studied a specimen caught in 1938. The capture in December, 1952, of another Coelacanth very similar to *Latimeria*, brought the above Museum exhibit, installed in 1945, back to widespread attention in the press early this year.

African ichthyologist, Professor J. L. B. Smith, of Rhodes University, is quoted as identifying as a Coelacanth.

The Coelacanth (hollow-spined) fishes, belonging to the larger group of Crossopterygian fishes, were believed to have been extinct since Cretaceous time (75 million years ago). On December 22, 1938, a living specimen of a Coelacanth, later named *Latimeria chalumnae*, was captured in a trawl in 234 feet of water three miles off the mouth of the Chalumna River, near East London, South Africa.

The recent stir in the daily press began with the acquisition by Professor Smith of a second specimen, caught about December 21, 1952, apparently of a species different from the first. It was netted in only 60 feet of water, 200 yards offshore from Anjuan Island, one of the Comoros situated off the northwest coast of Madagascar. This place of capture is more than 1,700 miles north of the locality of the first.

The only parts preserved of the first specimen were the skin and part of the skull. Most of the soft parts of the second specimen are well preserved, but apparently the head is badly damaged.

The Crossopterygian (fringe-finned) group, in addition to the Coelacanth branch, contains another subgroup, the Rhipidistians (fan-finned), from which the amphibians descended. Anatomical studies

Information based on the soft anatomy should shed considerable light on the structural organization of the group from which the first land-vertebrates arose.

A model of *Latimeria chalumnae*, constructed by Leon L. Pray from photographs, may be seen in the Hall of Fishes (Hall O) at this Museum.

LOREN P. WOODS
Curator of Fishes

Curator Pope to Resume Studies in Field

Clifford H. Pope, Curator of Amphibians and Reptiles, plans to make during late winter and early spring a study of the habits of the salamanders of southern California. This will add a new field of investigations to those he has already worked in the southern Appalachians and in central Mexico. In the summer of 1952, he carried on field studies of salamanders in the region of Jalapa, Veracruz, and collections of reptiles and other amphibians were made there. He will also visit the Mexican state of Sonora to secure series of desert reptiles for the study collection of the Museum.

Color photographs will be made to record the various salamander species and their haunts. Such pictures are especially valuable in working with animals that lose

FIFTY YEARS AGO AT THE MUSEUM

Compiled by MARGARET J. BAUER

From the *Annual Report of the Director* (the late Dr. Frederick J. V. Skiff) for the year 1903:

"Maintenance.—It was stated in my last report that the building was perfectly safe, and I have no hesitation in reiterating that statement, and no anxiety need be felt as to any accidents occurring either to visitors or to those employed in the building, but the periodical attempts to improve the outside appearance of the walls have ceased as it has been conclusively proven that such efforts were ineffectual. In fact, the introduction of new plaster in patching seemed to loosen a larger area than was repaired. The roof of the Museum building is, perhaps, today in better order than it ever has been, and it is doubtful if the interior has been so well protected from leakages since the construction of the building; but this condition is due to constant vigilance."

Daily Guide-Lectures

Free guide-lecture tours are offered at 2 P.M. daily except Sundays under the title "Highlights of the Exhibits." These tours are designed to give a general idea of the entire Museum and its scope of activities.

Special tours on subjects within the range of the Museum exhibits are available Mondays through Fridays for parties of ten or more persons. Requests for such service must be made at least one week in advance.

Although there are no tours on Sundays, the Museum is open from 9 A.M. to 5 P.M. (4 P.M. on weekdays).

NEW MEMBERS

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Life Member
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Isidore Brown, Howard T. Greene

Annual Members

Mrs. James J. R. T. Bishop, Stanley L. Chessman, Eugene Cotton, Mrs. Norman J. Dunbeck, Mrs. A. Norman Into, Dr. Ormand C. Julian, Mrs. Maurice H. Lockwood, Mrs. Paul D. V. Manning, Mrs. James P. Margeson, Jr., Mrs. Edward D. McDougal, Jr., Mrs. George W. Moyers, Wilbur J. O'Brien, Frank O. Prior, Mrs. Robert P. Resch, Sister Richard, Mrs. John Shedden, K. I. Thompson, Mrs. Thomas M. Ware, Richard F. Watt, Dr. Paul K. Weichselbaum, Reinald Werrenrath

much of their natural colors in preservative, as do salamanders. In these amphibians, color differences are of great value in classification.



1953. "Coelacanth, 'Front Page Fish,' is in Museum." *Bulletin* 24(2), 8–8.

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