

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.

ADVICE ON SCIENTIFIC WRITING

As editor and consulting editor and member of editorial boards, I long ago found it a useful defense to have at hand a slip on which was printed Charles Darwin's advice to a young colleague. This charming quotation provides support of an unimpeachable kind to my own editorial policy and practice, a support often needed. The enclosure of Darwin's words with a manuscript sent back to be rewritten in shortened form has, I hope, sometimes softened the blow to a young contributor who finds himself at the beginning of a task he had thought finished. The quotation, from a letter to John Scott dated December 11, 1862, is as follows:

"I have read your paper with much interest. You ask for remarks on the matter, which is alone really important. Shall you think me impertinent (I am sure I do not mean to be so) if I hazard a remark on the style, which is of more importance than some think? In my opinion (whether or not worth much), your paper would have been much better if written more simply and less elaborated—more like your letters. It is a golden rule always to use, if possible, a short old Saxon word. Such a sentence as 'So purely dependent is the incipient plant on the specific morphological tendency' does not sound to my ears like good mother-

English—it wants translating. Here and there you might, I think, have condensed some sentences. I go on the plan of thinking every single word which can be omitted without actual loss of sense as a decided gain. Now perhaps you will think me a meddling intruder: anyhow, it is the advice of an old hackneyed writer who sincerely wishes you well."

The letter reflects an unflinching aspect of the character of Charles Darwin—his unwillingness, in however small degree, to hurt the feelings of his young correspondent. Perhaps the manner of the suggestions needs to be called to the attention of editors as much as the advice itself needs to be set forth to would-be writers.

KARL P. SCHMIDT
Chief Curator of Zoology

SOMETIMES TRILLIUMS ARE QUADRILLIUMS

Do you know the beautiful white spring flower of the lily family, the white trillium? It is to be found in moist woodland in all of northeastern North America. Most of the lilies have their flower parts in threes, and the trillium almost always has three leaves on its single stalk, three green sepals and three white petals in its flower, with six stamens with their yellow pollen and three greenish stigmas inside. Just as there are four-leafed clovers, when all normal clovers have three leaves, so there are "quadrilliums," ordinary trilliums with all the parts in fours—four leaves, four sepals, four petals, eight stamens, and four stigmas. There are a great many other varieties of the white trillium—some with the flower all green, some with the sepals turned into petals, and beautiful double ones, like white roses. If you know a woods where the trilliums bloom, hunting for these strange varieties is a fascinating game for May.

KARL P. SCHMIDT
Chief Curator of Zoology

SHIPMENT OF SPECIMENS IN DRY ICE TESTED

Ten piranhas or "cannibal fish" caught in the Paraguay River in the state of Matto Grosso, Brazil, arrived recently at the Museum packed in dry ice.

Arrangements for the shipment were made by Henry L. Cook, vice president of the Liquid Carbonic Corporation, Chicago, on a recent visit to Brazil. Dry ice was sent by air and boat to the location where fishing was in progress. Immediately after being caught the fish were quick-frozen in dry ice which has a temperature of 110 degrees below zero (Fahrenheit).

By air the shipment could have been delivered in Chicago within about four days, but it was deliberately delayed in transit for a few additional days to obtain more complete data on the merits of the packing

method. Upon arrival and unpacking at the Museum, the fish specimens were found to be well preserved and to have retained their life colors.

The particular species of piranha received, attaining lengths up to about 10 inches, happens to be of the most ferocious type called "man-eating." Schools of them are famed for deadly attacks on animals and human beings fording streams or swimming in them.

MUSEUM HOLDS CLASSES FOR CAMP LEADERS

Several hundred camp counselors of the Chicago area attended a nature course conducted in all-day sessions at the Museum on March 17, 24, and 31. The instructors were members of the James Nelson and Anna Louise Raymond Foundation's lecture staff. The course was sponsored by the day camp committee of the Chicago Camping Association. Subjects covered included plants, insects, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, birds and their calls, fossils, mineralogy and Indian lore. Lectures on these subjects were supplemented by open discussions, tours of Museum exhibits, and work in small groups. Raymond Foundation lecturers who conducted classes were Miss Miriam Wood, Miss Dolla Cox, Miss Marie Svoboda, Miss Edith Fleming, Miss Nancy Worsham and Miss Harriet Smith.

Antioch College Pays Tribute To Museum Service

For its co-operation in a "study-work-and-earn" plan for college students, Chicago Natural History Museum has been awarded a certificate of recognition by Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Students at Antioch divide their school year between periods of formal classroom work on the campus and on-the-job training in various types of businesses and institutions all over the country. The Museum has been participating in this program since 1946, and has given temporary employment to seventy-two students. Some of these young men and women have been employed in the scientific departments of the Museum, while others have assisted in junior capacities in the administrative offices. The plan is still in operation, and several Antioch students are currently employed.

Belfast Museum Aide Here

George Thompson, Keeper of the Ethnographic Section of the Belfast Municipal Museum and Art Gallery, Belfast, Ireland, is spending several months at Chicago Natural History Museum. He is in this country on a Fulbright grant to make a study of American museological methods. The Belfast museum includes natural history as well as ethnography and art.



Schmidt, Karl Patterson. 1953. "Advice on Scientific Writing." *Bulletin* 24(4), 2-2.

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