

Chicago Natural History Museum

FOUNDED BY MARSHALL FIELD, 1893

Roosevelt Road and Lake Shore Drive, Chicago 5

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

Schooldays Are Here . . .

A SCIENTIST ADMONISHES TEACHERS AND PUPILS

By AUSTIN L. RAND

CHIEF CURATOR OF ZOOLOGY

IN THE COMMUNITY outside Chicago where I live, my wife and I are called on often each year by pupils of the local schools to advise and help in biology projects. Mrs. Rand keeps a few books handy to lend to children for this purpose, and within the year I've lent a dog skull from the miscellaneous collection in our garage, helped trace out the hearing apparatus in a freshly butchered cow's head, and suggested an arrangement for making a heterogeneous assortment of bones into a science display. This is, of course, unofficial aid.

Chicago Natural History Museum also takes an official interest in Science Fairs. In the spring of 1955 it exhibited projects undertaken by upper elementary and high-school students sponsored by the Chicago Teachers Science Association. These were shown in Stanley Field Hall, central hall of the Museum, between the main entrance and the elephants that so dominate the hall they are practically a trade mark of the Museum. This year, on May 12, the entire Science Fair was held at the Museum instead of being split, as in the past, among several institutions, by age and grade

groups and on several different dates. I've pointed out these activities of ours to show that both officially and unofficially we help and encourage science fairs and school projects, at two widely different levels.

SOME REQUESTS UNREASONABLE

However much we believe in helping and encouraging school science-projects, we get some types of requests of which we disapprove. The following is an example, quoted in its entirety:

Dear Gentlemen

I would like to request all the information you can give me on animals. Information on the classification of animals such as fish, reptiles, and so on will be appreciated. I would like this information for a ninth-grade science project. Please include some picture if possible. Also some on prehistoric animals. Thank you.

Sincerely

Three other similar letters came to my desk, all the same day in January, the beginning of the "science-project season." They contain such requests as: "I am working on a science project concerning . . . bird feathers . . . would like pictures . . . to use in my project . . ."

"I go to . . . school [this one in Chicago] and in science I have to make a notebook on . . . birds that stay all year round in Illinois . . . give me a list . . . and any information that you have on them . . . must have this information by the 15th of of this month . . . if you have any feathers please may I have some."

".... I am a sophomore participating in a biology contest I wish to inquire whether you have any information and specimens on the butterflies of Illinois.

If so, will you kindly mail them to me. I am willing to absorb mailing costs, and any other expenses."

Letters received on other days asked for bird feathers or all about parakeets.

WOULD NULLIFY PROJECT'S VALUE

They are polite, well-written letters. But compliance by us would nullify the object of the science project, which is to teach something about science, where to find material, and where to get information at a level the students can understand.

These letters are not from children interested in science, craving information. They are from children interested in a short cut to a project. Just suppose they were to write to an English or a history professor saying they were doing a project in one of those subjects and would the professor please send them a few suitable themes including one on spring and another on culture, or an outline of the American revolution, with a few maps and pictures, and if they have them a few pieces of armor, of course offering to pay mailing and other expenses.

A point these letters have in common is that they all seem to be teacher-inspired. They all ask help with school work—not collateral material, but the project itself.

Science projects have as their aim, the education of pupils. In any school with biology projects there is obviously a biology teacher and an abundance of material near at hand. And for information, as some of my correspondents seem to forget, there is the dictionary, the encyclopedia, the biology texts that any school teaching biology must surely have, and there is often a local library. For ideas there are the science and the nature journals, which contain ad-

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THIS MONTH'S COVER

Buy your mushrooms—don't gather them!

This is the advice of the scientists in the Museum's Department of Botany. The principal season when mushrooms are gathered by enthusiastic epicures is at hand, and many courageous souls with confidence in their own ability to distinguish between edible and poisonous varieties will be out seeking delicacies for their dining tables.

Mushrooms and related fungi appear in many shapes and colors besides those most familiar to gourmets. Many varieties, some edible, some poisonous, are shown in a special exhibit of large hand-colored photographs to be on view in Stanley Field Hall from September 1 until October 1. The Museum exhibit is *not* intended to be used as a guide in distinguishing between safe and dangerous kinds of mushrooms, however. Because of the dangers of a mistake even by many who think they are experts, Museum botanists distinctly warn against the practice of gathering wild mushrooms for food by laymen (when they want mushrooms, the botanists themselves buy them in grocery stores, which obtain them from commercial cultivators).

The 48 photographs on exhibition are the work of Herbert T. Tweedie, a retired portrait-photographer of Dayton, Ohio.



Rand, Austin Loomer. 1956. "A Scientist Admonishes Teachers and Pupils."
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