

WHAT do I do in the Museum? How do we get specimens? What do we do with them? and why do we have so many? These are the questions answered by the new exhibit of five cases just installed in Hall 13, using birds to illustrate the points. In one form or another, I have been asked these questions many times. They are easier to answer when you are talking to an individual. You can evaluate your listener and modify your pitch until you see you are getting across.

A satisfactory answer must be an intellectually satisfying one. It must fit into the questioner's background of information and his way of thinking. It must correlate with his frame of reference, and by building on what he has, enlarge his horizons. An answer in different terms is needed for a research meteorologist, a college teacher, a business executive, and an intelligent layman.

To answer the research meteorologist is easiest, for he is a man of few words even if they are big ones. I am a museum zoologist, specializing in ornithology and using specimens in my studies.

The college professor is a bit more complicated, for he likes to have things spelled out in a way that he can repeat to his class. For him I am a naturalist, one whose studies center around information to be read from specimens. Zoogeography, speciation, ecology, and behavior are my special interests. In these fields of study I make the results available to students by publishing them in journals and books, and available to the general public through the preparation of exhibits—three-dimensional displays of specimens, art work and text.

To the business executive, I say the Museum is like a factory of knowledge with wholesale and retail outlets. The raw material is specimens from field and forest, and our notes made while collecting this material. These, along with information in books, we process to produce new information, or to reinterpret old information in new ways. This we wholesale in the form of scientific papers and monographs, to be used by the retailers, the teachers and writers who prepare lectures for college courses and books for the public. Some information we prepare for the retail trade ourselves,

THE FLOW OF INFORMATION

Zoology's newest exhibit

Austin L. Rand, Chief Curator, Zoology



in books and articles for the general public. Some we retail by incorporating it into exhibits to place in our own museum exhibition halls, which are seen by an impressive total of 1,500,000 visitors annually.

For the intelligent layman, the best answer I have been able to devise is, "I write books about birds. Other curators in Zoology write about other kinds of animals." The printed page is familiar to most people and this gives a first common meeting ground. From this it is easy to talk about the specimens needed to supply the information; the Museum's role in providing facilities for study; the ways of getting specimens and the facts and ideas to be secured by studying specimens. Finally, one comes to the ultimate role of this information which will affect our understanding of man and nature, an understanding that becomes increasingly important in our complex modern world.

To explain this story to an individual is one thing. To prepare an exhibit to convey the same story to the cross section of the American public represented by our million and a half annual visitors, is another. The exhibit must be color-

ful, intriguing enough to attract the visitor, and interesting enough to hold him. The story should be told simply enough to reach the completely uninitiated, yet with enough intellectual content and artistic merit to appeal to the sophisticated. There must be enough diversity in material and approach so that there is something for everyone.

With these as our guidelines, we have prepared the story in five unit cases. We have given it the running title of *THE FLOW OF INFORMATION* to indicate that the information comes from animals in the wild that are brought as specimens to the Museum, where they are interpreted, and the information finally gets to the public by way of various books, or through exhibits.

The first of the five cases simply points out that Zoology is the study of animals, and that the Museum has specialists in mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, fishes, insects, and mollusks, each group illustrated with specimens. Though each type of animal needs different specialized techniques, the basic goal of the specialist in each is the same: to understand living nature.

The second unit case, labeled *EXPEDITION* and using birds as examples, shows specimen-collecting. A curator sits at a table in camp, surrounded by his equipment, preparing specimens and writing notes. Finished, dried specimens partly fill an open trunk. Real objects, replicas, photographs, silhouette cutout figures, and art work tell the story one way, while the story is also outlined in another, in two outsized pages of "comic book" type cartoons.

The third unit, labeled *RESEARCH*, shows the curator in his study, bent over his work table, with his material and reference works spread out in front of him, near a case of specimens. Actual specimens are arranged to the left to show some of the puzzling problems that have been solved by museum researchers. On the stand below is a handwritten manuscript and a typescript that have been used in a book.

The fourth case, *EXHIBITION*, shows how exhibits are made, from the original planning, layouts, pilot models, through art work, modeling and casting, taxidermy and reproducing of plant material, to the finished specimens and paintings. This provides a glimpse behind the scenes of the sort of work that goes into the exhibits of animals in Zoology exhibition halls. There one can see a synopsis of the various groups of animals in systematic series, and also these animals in habitat groups from various continents, giving windows on the world.

Finally, the fifth case, *COMMUNICATIONS*, shows the all-important flow of information from book to book to people. The dull looking scientific reports on the left are read by only a few people. But they provide the scientific basis for the more popular books with gaily-colored jackets in the center of the case, books read by the many. Ultimately, some of this information is gathered and woven into theories published in readable, philosophical books such as those shown to the right. From these theories come ideas that influence man's thinking, his social activities, and his concept of himself and the world around him. Lastly, the newspapers publish items about nature in its many aspects, giving the reading public an additional opportunity to be biologically literate.



Exhibit panel showing scientist at work in the field



Rand, Austin Loomer. 1965. "The Flow of Information: Zoology's Newest Exhibit." *Bulletin* 36(12), 4–5.

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