

And this includes the taxonomy of plants and microorganisms as well as of animals.

Today man has a good taxonomic understanding of the malarial parasites that affect him—the microscopic sporozoa as well as the mosquitoes which transmit the sporozoa. This knowledge was a prerequisite before effective defense against the parasites was possible. Researchers have also found that the schistosomes as well as the disease-transmitting snails in bilharziasis form intricate complexes of different races and strains, each with its own unique behavior. Susceptibility and resistance vary between these races and strains, and such characteristics may be determined by not just one gene but several. So the taxonomy of these organisms must, perforce, concern itself with the most subtle distinctions between closely related forms. Similarly, it is important to have taxonomic knowledge of other protozoa, flukes, tapeworms, and roundworms that are parasitic in man or in his domestic animals, or which ruin his food supplies, or which are harmful to him in other ways.

Specimens that are studied by the taxonomist must be kept as documentary material. In time, these specimens may have to be reevaluated. New discoveries and further research may reveal information that supersedes previous observations. And changes in nature itself, spontaneous or man-made, may make comparisons between collections from different periods of time highly significant. Where reliable taxonomic information is wanting, zoological investigation often becomes valueless. If, on the other hand, the material is properly documented, specimens can be accurately identified as a matter of routine. Documentary material of this kind is seldom available at universities or most other institutions with scientific departments. It is the natural history museum, almost exclusively, which is the repository of such material. The taxonomist, therefore, relies on such

museums for much of his research. These institutions also provide a taxonomic service to other scientific institutions and agencies. This service, which is truly indispensable, involves a wide range of techniques in morphology, morphometry, histology, and even serology. Some museums provide a taxonomic service based partly or entirely on histological and/or biochemical methods.

The natural history museum, then, is today much more than a repository of specimens, where one can spend a delightful afternoon viewing stunning exhibits of exotic specimens. It is a vital part of the world's scientific community, helping in its unique way to advance the frontiers of science.

So our young zoologist, fascinated years ago by some curious preserved specimens, was led into vital taxonomic research—research that proved valuable in man's fight against a serious disease. And still later it was our zoologist's fate to become a museum administrator, and in that role it was quite appropriate that he write this brief essay. □

Clifford H. Pope, 1899-1974

Clifford H. Pope, formerly Curator of Amphibians and Reptiles, died at his retirement home in Escondido, California, early in June. He joined the staff of Field Museum in June, 1940, and retired in December, 1953. The author of numerous scientific publications, Pope was considered to be the expert on Chinese amphibians and reptiles. That stature was a result of his having spent five years in China during the 1920s as a member of the famous Roy Chapman Andrews expeditions. But he was best known as the author of several remarkably successful popular books on reptiles. His *Snakes Alive* has probably been read by more young—and some not so young—would-be herpetologists than any other book in the last forty years.

It was perhaps typical of Clifford (it is impossible for those who know him well to refer to him in a more conventional, formal mode) that he converted his interest in



Clifford H. Pope

keeping and feeding a young Indian python into a means of educating his neighbors out of their prejudices against snakes and into an excellent popular book, *Giant Snakes*.

Clifford had such a nice facility at this kind of educational activity that he decided, quite sensibly, to end the commuting hassle, retire from the Museum at an earlier than customary age, and devote himself to popular writing.

When he died, a friend writing in the *Escondido Daily Times-Advocate*, said she was certain that Clifford, wherever he had passed on to will, "... set about in his low keyed, tongue-in-cheek manner debunking all the myths about serpents being the symbols of evil and the cause of original sin.

"Just as he did for a long lifetime on earth, he will quietly convert the children to the side of the snakes, and then demonstrate to the worried mothers ... that a snake, freed of the prejudice against him, is the child's friend, to be respected and handled gently."

— Robert F. Inger, assistant director,
science and education



Inger, Robert F. 1974. "Clifford H. Page, 1899-1975." *Field Museum of Natural History bulletin* 45(8), 16-16.

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