

EXPLORATIONS

Wilkins on Great Adventure

Capt. George H. Wilkins' proposed exploratory flight over the unknown Arctic area north of Alaska is "one of the most heroic and dramatic adventures of polar history" according to two other famous explorers, Commander Richard E. Byrd and Vilhjalmur Stefansson.

In a communication to the scientific magazine, *Science*, they point out that Capt. Wilkins, his pilot, Lieut. Ben Eielson, and their associates have already made striking contributions to science and the progress of northern aviation, although their program is only at its beginning.

On March 29 of this year Wilkins and Eielson made an exploratory flight and a forced landing about 500 miles from Point Barrow. During the two weeks' journey back over the ice, they added greatly to the knowledge of arctic conditions. Deep sea soundings that were made through the ice convinced them that it is improbable that there is undiscovered land in the 600,000 mile section to the northwest of Barrow.

For this reason, according to Byrd and Stefansson, "Wilkins now plans to cross the 300,000-mile section to the northeast, where there is the best remaining chance of land. He expects to fly diagonally through the middle of it from Barrow to 84° N. Lat. and 100° W. Long. and thence to Ellesmere Island, coming down when they have to or possibly flying nearly, if not quite, all the way to Etah.

"If the plane comes down anywhere on this route, Wilkins expects his party to live by hunting seals and make their way to the nearest inhabited land. This will be Alaska if they have hard luck and come down soon. It may be any of the Canadian islands, according to how far they succeed in flying; it will be Etah, northwest Greenland, if everything goes like clockwork. The outcome of the adventure can not be known before perhaps mid-summer when Danish trading ships go up to Etah or the Canadian government ships go to Ellesmere Island. If nothing is heard then or before that time, it will mean either a fatal landing or a successful landing at a distance from which the party are returning, building snow-houses in winter, using skin tents in summer and living on sea game. Wilkins estimates the maximum time necessary for such a return on

foot will be two years. We wish him luck with his great adventure."

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AGRICULTURE

Flood Sand Injures Land

Absolutely inert sand, requiring from eight to ten years to be modified to a point where even grass will grow, is one of the tragedies facing farmers in certain sections flooded by the Mississippi.

A report from B. R. Coad, government entomologist in charge of cotton insect investigations at Tallulah, La., states that inert sand covers several miles of the finest and most beautifully developed farming land of the Mississippi Delta, in the Scott district. Other similar but smaller sand deposits have been noted at various points of the flooded parts.

According to H. H. Bennett of the U. S. Bureau of Soils, such deposits of inert sand are made when the current of the rushing waters is slightly slowed down; as when it meets with a comparatively small obstruction. The sand is composed largely of quartz particles which, since they are rock fragments, are heavier than the fertile silt and clay content of the water. The sand content naturally separates itself first, while the silt and clay are carried along in the water and deposited when the current is further slowed down. The sand, due to its quartz make-up, is infertile and consequently for years nothing can be grown in areas where it is deposited. To remove it would be too expensive a proposition.

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BOTANY

Old Lotus Seeds Better

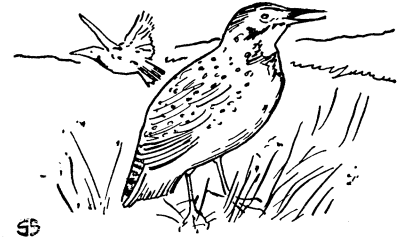
Seeds of the Indian lotus a hundred years old have more active life in them than the same kind of seeds of last year's crop, according to a report of Dr. Ichiro Ohga of the Educational Institute of Dairen, Manchuria, to the American Journal of Botany. Dr. Ohga tested these ancient seeds both by sprouting and by chemical examination, and they won on both counts. The research was carried on during Dr. Ohga's sojourn in this country, at the Boyce Thompson Institute, Yonkers.

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Thomas Jefferson, who made a number of useful inventions and who organized the U. S. Patent Office, never applied for any patent.

NATURE RAMBLINGS

By FRANK THONE



Meadow Lark

The biographer of St. Francis of Assisi relates that when his master lay dying, flocks of hooded larks came and sang around the house, as though in last greeting to one who had loved them. For while Francis loved all the birds God made, these larks, the scribe goes on to say, held first place in his affection.

Had this patron saint of naturalists, and of all folk who walk quietly through fields and woods, lived in America instead of Italy, he would have found in our meadow larks most worthy rivals of their relatives of the Old World. One who can deny himself to the small extent of getting up early (surely no very ascetic exercise!) will find it easy to follow the example of the gentle friar, and love the larks the best.

The American meadow lark is a fine, upstanding, sturdy bird, not conspicuously colored yet handsomely marked, with a dash of worldliness about his costume, in the black gorget set off by yellow. He does not aspire to towering song, as does the skylark, but rises singing to little heights and descends to earth again near the well-hidden nest among the grasses, where his mate is absorbed in family cares.

The meadowlark's nest is indeed a masterpiece in camouflage, as might be expected of a bird that thrives in spite of the fact that it makes its home in the most perilous of all places, right on the ground, exposed even to hungry beasts that can neither fly nor climb, which tree-dwelling birds escape. Human nest-hunters rarely find it, unless they almost step on it, so gray it is among the gray grasses and so still does the brooding mother sit even when you are within a few feet of her. Being a meadow lark calls for courage as well as singing ability.

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