

OCEANOGRAPHY

Icebergs May be Grounded Along Coast of Labrador

By DR. OLAV MOSBY
Oceanographer, U. S. Coast Guard Vessel "General Greene."

THE U. S. Coast Guard's oceanographic vessel *General Greene* has just recently returned from a four-thousand-mile cruise between Labrador and Greenland. Observations of temperature and salinities were made at 122 points in six crossings of the Labrador current and two sections between Labrador and Greenland. These measurements were taken in thirteen levels down to depths of two thousand meters (six thousand feet). We took more than seventeen hundred soundings.

On the Labrador coast about one hundred icebergs were sighted but we made contact with only three of them. Hundreds of bergs must be grounded and are disintegrating along the coast.

Hudson Strait is free of ice and we sighted only three bergs.

Remnants of pack ice and about five hundred icebergs were sighted between Ivigtut and Cape Farewell, on the south tip of Greenland.

Of all the bergs seen, only two were more than sixty miles off shore. The scientific results of the expeditions have not yet been completed.

Science News Letter, August 22, 1931

ORNITHOLOGY

First Eggs of Harris's Sparrow are Discovered

A GAP in the bird study of North America lasting for almost a century has been bridged with what is believed to be the first authentic discovery of eggs of the Harris's Sparrow. Credit for this find goes to the naturalist, George Miksch Sutton, and his associate, John Bonner Semple. Both have recently returned from an expedition to Churchill, Canada, on Hudson Bay, the nesting region of the bird.

Harris's Sparrow, a shy individual with a black hood and white under parts, was one of the few American birds left whose eggs had not been found. Sets of doubtful identification, however, have been preserved and descriptions generally held erroneous, also given.

In reporting his discovery to Science Service, Mr. Sutton said:

"The eggs are not 'creamy-white' (as a previous description states), but are

very pale greenish-blue, spotted, blotched and scrawled more or less all over with brown, lilac, gray and rusty."

It was not until the nineteenth century that the breeding range of the Harris's Sparrow was known. Half the year the bird haunts the Missouri River basin and migrates northward to breed with the approach of spring. The bird was unknown to ornithologists until 1834 when it was discovered near Independence, Mo., by Thomas Nuttall.

The details of Mr. Sutton's findings are expected to be presented at the meeting of the American Ornithologists Union which will be held in Detroit about the latter part of October.

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MEDICINE

Fleas Are Convicted Of Carrying Typhus Germs

FLEAS, long suspected of transmitting endemic typhus fever in the United States, have at last been convicted of the offense by conclusive evidence, the U. S. Public Health Service has just reported. The proof that rat fleas are a transmitting agent for the disease was obtained by laboratory tests.

For months, Drs. R. E. Dyer, A. S. Rumreich, and L. F. Badger, of the U. S. Public Health Service have been working on the case, to determine once and for all whether fleas were responsible for spreading the disease, or whether some other agent should be sought. In Europe and Asia, typhus is spread by the body louse, but cases in the United States have occurred where no such source of infection was possible.

In February, the doctors reported that their experiments had reached a point at which it seemed almost certain that fleas are typhus carriers. Now, that belief is confirmed. The proof was obtained by injecting white rats with the virus of endemic typhus, and then putting fleas on them. Six of these fleas were later emulsified and injected into two guinea pigs. Both guinea pigs developed the symptoms of endemic typhus. Other fleas from the infected rats were placed in a new box containing some white rats infected with typhus and some non-infected. In two weeks, one of the rats that had not had the disease was killed and fleas from its body were again treated and injected into guinea pigs, and the disease developed in the guinea pigs. Other experiments added to the evidence of the rat fleas as the carriers.

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IN SCIENCE

GENETICS

Deficiency in Taste Found Matter of Inheritance

INABILITY of some people to taste a chemical that is extremely bitter and even nauseating to others is an inherited trait, Prof. L. H. Snyder of Ohio State University has discovered.

Using the chemical para-ethoxyphenyl-thio-urea with which Dr. Arthur L. Fox of the Du Pont laboratories, Wilmington, Del., discovered the strange difference in tasting ability, Prof. Snyder verified Dr. Fox's conclusion that the taste deficiency actually exists and that it is not a matter of age, sex, nor race.

Then he tested a hundred families with the chemical. In the results which he published in *Science*, Prof. Snyder concludes that the taste deficiency is apparently due to a single recessive gene or bearer of heredity in the hereditary make-up of human beings. It is not sex-linked or influenced by sex as are some other human deficiencies, such as lack of clotting power of the blood.

"When neither parent can taste the compound," Prof. Snyder reports, "none of the children can taste it."

Science News Letter, August 22, 1931

ZOOLOGY

Goldfish Survive Test In Tobacco-Soaked Water

GOLDFISH can be trained to develop a tolerance for the poison of tobacco, but smokers should not therefore feel that any amount they take in is harmless after once acquiring the habit. This is the advice of Drs. Leon Binet and C. Zamfir, French physicians.

Increasing amounts of tobacco-water made by soaking two grains of good Maryland tobacco in a liter of river water, were placed in the goldfish bowl every other day. On alternate days they got fresh water again. After 51 days the goldfish survived exposure in water so strong that it killed unprepared goldfish in an hour. After 66 days they swam in the extract straight.

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E FIELDS

MEDICINE

Lack of Iron in Diet May be Cause of Pellagra

LACK OF IRON in the diet rather than lack of vitamin G may be the cause of pellagra, it appears from studies which Dr. Sidney Bliss of Tulane University School of Medicine has reported to *Science*.

The diet of corn bread and molasses on which most of the poor people in the South live is lacking in iron as well as in vitamin G, Dr. Bliss pointed out. Furthermore, all the foods listed as preventive or curative of pellagra because of their large vitamin G content, also contain large amounts of iron. Among these he mentioned beef, liver, egg yolk, and yeast.

Fifty-one persons suffering from pellagra were accordingly given iron by intravenous injection. The results are encouraging, Dr. Bliss reported, although it is still too early to state whether these patients will recover entirely from the disease on iron alone.

Dr. Bliss and associates also studied the effect of iron on dogs suffering from black-tongue, considered by some authorities to be the canine counterpart of pellagra. The dogs were fed on a diet of peas, cracker meal and cottonseed oil. Black-tongue developed in all its severity. When iron was injected into the veins of these animals, but no change in diet was made, the animals promptly recovered.

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PSYCHOLOGY

Noise Does not Always Impair Working Ability

NOISY surroundings may be uncomfortable, but they do not necessarily mean that less work can be done.

The Industrial Health Research Board in London has just summarized its investigations on noise and vibration in field and laboratory.

No experimental evidence is available to show that automatic performance suffers from noise or vibration, the board

reports. However, except with certain "meaningful" noises, both noise and vibration are "disagreeable" and "uncomfortable" accompaniments. A continuous noisy background often seems to have an initial stimulating effect, and this appears to indicate that noise should be looked upon as an adverse condition which is met by unconscious increased effort.

With constructive work involving mental effort fairly consistent slight deterioration is observed, particularly in continued effort. Although so far as the experiments go, the deterioration is barely significant, its consistency seems to point to its being significant "psychologically." Discontinuous noise is more disturbing than continuous noise; "meaningful" noise may be more or less disturbing than "unmeaning" noise according as it is interesting or familiar.

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ARCHAEOLOGY

Stone Age Village Site Unearthed in Germany

THE SITE of a village built perhaps ten thousand years ago has been excavated by scientists of the Wallraf-Richarz Museum of Cologne, Germany. Traces of the ancient houses were discovered in a more or less accidental fashion at Mungersdorf, a suburb of Cologne, and the dig has now disclosed what is perhaps the most complete settlement of the New Stone Age yet discovered in Germany.

The village was irregularly oblong in outline, surrounded by a defensive wall and ditch. It consisted of about thirty houses. Most of these were roughly circular, but near one end was a larger rectangular structure, possibly a chief's house or a temple. All the houses were built in the same way: a row of posts set into the ground for the main walls, and the space between filled in with woven wicker covered with clay, forming a wattle-and-daub-surface.

Nothing now remains of the houses except the blackened spots in the yellow clay soil that mark the old post-holes, but these marks stand out in such strong contrast that it is easy to trace the lines of the former walls. Fire-hearths that once occupied the centers of the huts, and holes that served as food caches and rubbish-catchers are also distinguishable.

Very few articles of human manufacture have been turned up.

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PSYCHOLOGY

Children Like Comedy Best in Motion Pictures

THE COMEDY is the child's first choice in motion picture entertainment, with the feature a close second. Next in order comes the serial.

These preferences and many other facts regarding movie likes and dislikes and the habits of the younger members of the audience were disclosed by means of a questionnaire filled out by 800 children in grades one to eight of the schools in and near Los Angeles, California. The study was made by the Women's Education Club of the University of California.

Most of the children go to the movies once a week during the week-end, but 17.5 per cent. go oftener. They pay ten cents, more than a third of them earning the money. Nearly three-fourths go to the neighborhood theater, and two-thirds go accompanied by adults.

More than half the children are allowed to choose the film they wish to see from "reading about them." They like cowboys and excitement; they do not like to be made sad or frightened.

The pictures from which the child learns something are equally popular with the funny and exciting pictures. Tom Mix is the most popular actor, and Clara Bow the favorite actress.

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ENGINEERING

Four-Wheel Brakes Make New Safety Code Necessary

WIDE INTRODUCTION of four-wheel brakes and tremendous increase in commercial transportation by automobile has rendered obsolete the national safety code for braking systems.

Under a new code, being prepared under the auspices of the American Standards Association, all types of brake and brake testing systems for both commercial and passenger vehicles will be covered; at present only two-wheel brakes on passenger cars are dealt with.

More than thirty organizations of national scope including automobile manufacturers, associations, and technical bodies will cooperate in drawing up the new code.

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