

ENTOMOLOGY-BIOGRAPHY

Pioneer Naturalist Honored On 150th Anniversary

THOMAS SAY, noted American naturalist and an authority on insects, was honored in ceremonies dedicated to the 150th anniversary of his birth at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, which he helped to found in 1812.

As a naturalist Thomas Say was the first to describe the malarial mosquito, said the Mayor of Philadelphia, S. Davis Wilson, in the commemorative address. Say's many other works on insects make fitting the title sometimes applied to him—"Father of American Entomology."

Say was born in Philadelphia July 27, 1787 and died in New Harmony, Indiana, an idealized communal colony, on October 10, 1834.

Besides insects Thomas Say was interested in, and made advances of knowledge in the study of conchology (shells) and edited *The American Conchology*, a journal devoted to this field. Also as an editor he prepared for publication the volumes on American ornithology by Charles Bonaparte.

Under his own name Thomas Say published *American Entomology*, which featured many colored plates of insects.

As an explorer, Say collected on the sea islands off the coast of Georgia and in eastern Florida. Twice he went into what was then the far west for the United States government collecting large amounts of material. He also made one trip to Mexico with the great geologist, William Maclure, accompanied by bodyguards and much formality.

Thomas Say fought in the war of 1812 as a member of the first city troop of Philadelphia.

Science News Letter, August 7, 1937



Friends or Foes?

MUSKRATS can be counted man's friends or foes on a basis almost purely geographical. In the natural marsh areas where they thrive best, as along the shores of Maryland and Louisiana, and in some lake-dotted interior states like Minnesota, the little animals are valuable sources of fur and at least secondary sources of meat. Their skins sell at \$1.25 to \$2.00 or more depending on quality, and their flesh finds a ready market, in some cities at least, as "marsh rabbit." Owners of marshland protect and encourage them—even establish muskrat "farms" and pay high prices for select breeding pairs.

Against them may be scored their often pernicious activity in burrowing into embankments along streams and canals, loosing ruinous floods and interfering with navigation. Introduced into central Europe some decades ago, muskrats have proved themselves about the most unpopular of all American visitors. They have made themselves altogether too much at home, and promise to stay

altogether too long. So bad has been the experience of Germany and other Continental countries that when a few hundred muskrats were discovered in Scotland and England some years ago, Parliament appropriated 25,000 pounds for their eradication with hardly a word of argument.

The Central European muskrats do not offer any redeeming features at all. Their fur is reported to be greatly inferior to American muskrat pelts in quality, and apparently the people have not yet learned that their flesh is good to eat—indeed one of the most palatable of all game meats. Vernon Bailey, veteran American mammalogist, states that while muskrat meat is in high demand on the Baltimore market, he found Louisianians quite ignorant of its tooth-someness. So the unwilling European host of our emigrated muskrats may have to be educated up to their possible table value.

Two things militate against the ready use of muskrats as food. Most of us, of whatever race, don't like rats, and the very idea of eating a rat is repugnant to us. This works an injustice to the muskrat, because he is not really a rat. Some rodents we eat very willingly, like rabbits and squirrels. Hence the "marsh-rabbit" masquerade. A ready German translation suggests itself: *Sumpfhase*.

The second possible difficulty lies in the muskrat's scent glands. If these are cut or broken in skinning the animal, the flavor of the meat is ruined. But if they are properly removed (and it doesn't require much skill for that) they leave the flesh in prime condition, ready to progress through the kitchen to a triumph in the dining-room.

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Since the ultraviolet rays in sunlight are especially harmful to old documents, paintings, and textiles, exhibit halls frequently are provided with window glass excluding these rays and with special electric bulbs for artificial lighting.

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