ZOOLOGY

NATURE RAMBLINGS by Frank Thone

Aquatic Altruist

BEAVER colonies now being planted in the West, as natural conservation engineers, have an earnest of success in the history of a colony started near New York City as far back as 1920, William H. Carr, director of the Bear Mountain Trailside Museums, suggests. (*Natural History,* Sept.)

Eighteen years ago, Mr. Carr relates, three pairs of beaver were released in Bear Mountain State Park, forty miles north of New York. During that time their numbers have increased a hundredfold. The number of colonies now is more than sixty, distributed over a thirty-mile radius. Some of the migrating animals even swam the Hudson at a point where it is more than a mile wide.

The beaver colonies have brought benefits to many other life-forms. Their ponds have been breeding grounds for fish as well as for the insects and water-animals that fish eat. Wood ducks, once listed as exceedingly scarce for the region, have now become common. Even the trees killed by flooding when the ponds were formed have benefited a rare form of wildlife, the pileated woodpecker.

The usefulness of a beaver pond does not end even when it is abandoned and the breaking of the dam permits it to drain. On the rich soil formed of its silty bottom, reeds, cattails, bushes, and eventually trees move in. Songbirds congregate in the lush thickets, and fur-bearers like muskrat, raccoon and skunk find them good feeding grounds. As the thickets grow, deer begin to appear. Mr. Carr considers himself justified in calling the beaver an altruist.

Science News Letter, September 10, 1938

No place in England is more than 70 miles from the sea.

AGRICULTURE

Legumes Like Lespedeza Mean Much to Agriculture

LEGUMES—lespedeza—forage crops—and a lot of other big words are meaning much to farmers these days when soil improvement is almost as important as crops.

Legumes have the happy faculty of enriching the soil on which they grow so far as nitrogen is concerned. They take nitrogen directly from the air and manufacture it into plant food, through a partnership arrangement with bacteria that live on their roots.

Alfalfa and red clover are the commoner legumes, but the vetches, field peas and the annual lespedezas are also important.

There are others that most people have never heard of. The agronomists and plant breeders have them tucked away in their experimental plots, testing them, seeing what they are good for. Some of them may be the legumes of the future, plants that will allow the farmer to get crops profitably from unpromising land.

One of the most intriguing is a kind of lespedeza that does not need to be planted each year. This perennial species, *Lespedeza sericea,* comes back year after year from the crown as in alfalfa. It is still somewhat of a novelty in spite of its introduction from China before the turn of the century. Although grown commercially, it is still something to show visiting agriculturalists at such places as the Tennessee Experiment Station or Arlington Experimental Farms near Washington.

Older stands grow tall and bushy. Hay can be cut from it two or three times a year. One fault is that it contains too much tannin, the stuff used for tanning leather, to please livestock too well, but when the plant is made into ensilage the tannin content is reduced so that stock eat it readily.

It produces lots of seed which is beginning to be used in poultry feeds. Better learn how to pronounce lespedeza.

Science News Letter, September 10, 1938

SEISMOLOGY

Philadelphia Earthquake Epicenter Near Trenton

EPICENTER has been determined for the light earthquakes that recently shook the Philadelphia region, by scientists of the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, using data obtained by Science Service. Center of the disturbances was near Imlaytown, in the western end of Monmouth County, N. J., a little less than fifteen miles southeast of Trenton.

Locating the epicenter was more difficult than if the quakes had been at a much greater distance, but stronger, so that they would have registered on more instruments. As it was, the shocks were so mild that they left readable traces only on the seismographs at Fordham University, New York City, and at the Franklin Institute, in Philadelphia.

Science News Letter, September 10, 1938

Wood does not necessarily decay with age: fungus is the cause of decay.