

BIOLOGY

NATURE RAMBLINGS



Bird of Opulence

► **TURKEY RAISERS** have developed a small bird more commensurate with the capacities of today's small families.

They have reduced the bird to the proportions of a more workaday menu, removed roast turkey from the category of exclusively feast-day fare.

One bows to inevitable progress, but not without a sense of loss. The whole spirit of the traditional Thanksgiving turkey lies in its amplitude, its largesse. Turkey is more than an outside chicken. When our forefathers cast about for the piece de resistance of the first Thanksgiving, there were no rival candidates.

Turkey was elected unanimously not alone because he was so abundant but also because his fleshy endowments perfectly suited him for the role. Not only was he palatable, he was big. A gentleman named William Wood, writing in Massachusetts about 1630, observed that "These Turkeys remaine all the yeare long, the price of a good Turkie cock is foure shillings; and he is well worth it, for he may be in weight forty pound."

The turkey was unknown in the Old World. It was found by the explorers and colonists all the way from Central America to southern Maine. Flocks of the birds roved the forests in great numbers, being especially numerous in New England.

The feeding habits of the wild turkey were extremely adaptable, and this in large measure was his undoing. Hunters would lie in wait around cornfields and when the birds settled to feed would slaughter them in quantity. A common expedient was to lay out long lines of corn along the length of a ditch and then pour a fusillade into the flock of sitting birds.

By such indiscriminate killing, the wild turkey was wiped out in all but a few localities, notably the less inhabited areas of the Gulf States. The last recorded shooting of a wild turkey in Massachusetts was a year or two before the Civil War. This took place on a mountain fittingly called Mt. Tom. Today's table turkey is a domesticated bird, raised on a turkey farm.

The white man was by no means the first to appreciate the prime gustatory qualities of Tom Turkey. The Indians of Mexico had already brought the bird under domestication when the Spaniards came. Cortez found them in the markets of Mexico. And it is through him, by a devious route, that the turkey gets its misleading name.

The Spaniards brought turkeys back to Europe with them. From Spain they were carried to the Near East, whence they were introduced into northern Europe. Like several other native American products, among them tobacco and corn, turkey was thought to have originated in Turkey, or even farther east, in India.

Benjamin Franklin wished to make turkey the American symbol, rather than the bald eagle. Both Franklin and the ornithologist Audubon pointed out that the eagle, a pirate and a thief, was not an especially flattering or fitting emblem. They both maintained that the turkey, which at least does not poach on his neighbors' preserves, was more appropriate.

The highest tribute we pay the turkey is to eat him with gusto. And this observance has a fitness all its own. It is certainly an honor we would never pay an eagle.

Science News Letter, November 21, 1953

Tuna has a protein value greater than that of beef and equivalent to that of milk.

Modern auto *batteries* rarely fail in one night; regular service station checks usually can provide advance warning of an imminent failure.

Questions

AERONAUTICS—In what way can TV signals menace air navigation? p. 329.

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BIOLOGY—What are the purposes of plant-collecting expeditions? p. 330.

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HEMATOLOGY—How can the blood of a universal donor be dangerous? p. 329.

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MEDICINE—How does an artificial kidney hold hope for aid to patients with heart disease? p. 325.

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TECHNOLOGY—What advantages are predicted for headlights of the future over those of today? p. 326.

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MARINE BIOLOGY

Sea Slugs Air Shipped To Keep Brilliant Colors

► **AIR SHIPMENT** of living sea slugs from Florida to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington allows scientists to make complete descriptions of the brilliant colors of the slugs.

Nudibranchs, the technical name for the tiny shell-less marine snails, are often called the flowers of the sea. Their color, however, fades rapidly when the animal is preserved in alcohol. As a result, few people have ever seen the full beauty of a sea slug.

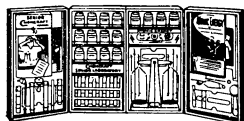
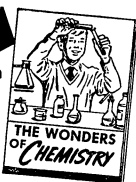
Dr. Harold J. Humm of the University of Florida ships specimens to the Smithsonian by air in specially designed bottles of sea water to keep them alive for several days. The Smithsonian has one of the world's largest collections of nudibranchs.

Science News Letter, November 21, 1953

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