

NATURE RAMBLINGS

by Frank Thome

ZOOLOGY—ETYMOLOGY



Naming Themselves

ISN'T IT ODD, how many animals' names resemble the sounds made by the animals themselves!

Primitive man must, at least part of the time, have followed the same system used by many parents in giving "baby-talk" names to animals and other things that make sounds—"moo-moo" for cow, "baa-baa" for sheep, "choo-choo" for locomotive, and so on. At any rate, any language will yield some of these onomatopoeic animal names.

Thus the word "wolf" has in it some echo of yelping bark, as has also the Latin name for the same animal "lupus," surviving still in our West as the Spanish "lobo." The coyote's name as well has something of an animal sound.

"Dog" is not a name that a dog might give himself; but consider the German "Hund" and its English cognate "hound"—the baying pack names itself a thousand times over as it runs! A shriller, more eager animal bay is in the Greek name for dog, "kyon"; take away the formal grammatical ending and step on the dog's ending, and in his pained and startled "kiyi!" you can almost hear your pup tell you his name in the language of Homer.

The English word "cow," again does not sound very much like anything out of cow language; but try the German "Kuh," and see whether that does not bring you an echo of a familiar farmyard sound. And a bull might bellow his own name easily enough.

The German for donkey, "Esel," has about it the suggestion of a bray, as has also its Latin equivalent "asinus," if you stress the middle syllable a little. Similarly, the German "Ganz" (goose) has a suggestion of the big bird's honk-

ing voice, and again the related Latin word "anser" echoes it faithfully.

Whether all of these names actually originated in this way is of course largely speculative; but when we come to the names of many familiar woodland birds we are on much firmer ground. One need only to mention such small fowl as cuckoo, peewee or phoebe, jay, flicker, chewink, chickadee, godwit, killdeer, and whippoorwill to be introduced at once to the birds and their most characteristic calls.

In the many throaty sounds made by the pigeon tribe we might possibly detect "dove," more easily its German cognate "Taube," and quite certainly the Latin "columbia" and "turtur"—the latter the parent-word of our "turtle" dove.

It makes a good game to think up as long a list of these possibly self-named animals and birds as you can, and then consult a good dictionary (the huge many-volumed Oxford Dictionary for choice) to see how many of your guesses were right.

Science News Letter, February 17, 1934

CHEMISTRY—PHYSICS

Unique Medal is Given For Work of Whole Laboratory

THE PINNING of medals upon scientists to honor their accomplishments is a frequent and inspiring function of learned societies. Much less frequently appreciative honors are awarded an organization as a unit for its contributions to science. A few days ago a gold medal was presented by the American Institute of New York City to the General Electric Company for "pioneering in industrial research" and Dr. W. D. Coolidge, director of the GE research laboratory, made the acceptance address.

Employment in the GE research laboratory places a worker in science at no disadvantage as compared with his academic confreres in respect to freedom to pursue new knowledge, Dr. Coolidge explained, and it gives him the advantage arising from satisfaction in seeing his scientific discoveries promptly and effectively applied, not only for advancing the industry, but also truly serving the public. He gave an example:

"In the early days of our laboratory we made a series of discoveries—first on the metallization of carbon, then on the metallurgy of tungsten, and, finally, on the heat conductivity of gases and on the effect of gas pressure on the

vaporization of tungsten—which enabled the General Electric Company to play a major role in increasing the efficiency of incandescent lighting to more than six times what it was when our laboratory was first started. For this our laboratory claims by no means all the credit. Much is due to the engineers and factory men, for the development of improved designs, new factory processes, and marvelously efficient automatic machines. This is why the presentation of a medal to a company rather than to an individual seems fitting. As a result of this conjoint effort, the cost to the public of electric light has been reduced to a small fraction of what it was thirty years ago for the benefit of each improvement has been promptly passed on to the public in the form of better and more efficient lamps at a price representing only a fair profit. Thus, for each dollar of profit the company has made on its lamps, the public has enjoyed savings amounting to hundreds of dollars—as can easily be shown by figures.

"So today we see the results of past researches in metastable atoms and plasmas being progressively embodied in new and more efficient lamps having sodium vapor as the illuminant, just as in the past our investigation of heat conduction and tungsten evaporation in gases gave us the gas-filled incandescent lamp; we see our studies of cold cathode effects (field currents) in high vacuum leading to higher voltage tubes for X-ray production and other purposes; researches in surface chemistry have given us better photoelectric tubes and perhaps are about to give us better lubrication; studies in mechanical balancing have given us better and quieter rotating machines; and from fundamental studies in chemistry are coming new and better synthetic resins."

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