



In Defense of Pelicans

THAT WONDERFUL bird, the pelican, focus of popular ornithological attention ever since his mandibular storage facilities were profanely (though poetically) estimated in terms of sen-nights, has for long been a cause of contention among naturalists. Friends of fishes, awed by the super-gastric capacity of his almost-avernal pouch, periodically rise to denounce him. Ired pro-pelicanists thereupon rise to his defense.

Most recent among these discussions of the pelican's activities as a living fish-trap is one that has been conducted in a leading conservation periodical, *California Fish and Game*. Herein Ben H. Thompson, of the U. S. National Park Service, appears in the role of *advocatus pelicanis*, refuting a writer in an earlier issue, who had accused the bird of scooping vast numbers of choice game fish out of fresh waters. Mr. Thompson points out that the white pelican (here singled out from its eastern kinsbird, the brown pelican) breeds on islands in saline lakes as well as in fresh, and secures its food indiscriminately from both sources. The white pelican, Mr. Thompson continues, cares no more for kind of fish than it does for source: catfish or carp are as welcome grist to his hopper as are trout or grayling. A large portion of its diet, he claims, is composed of fish and other aquatic animals considered unfit for food by man.

No Storage

Most disillusioning to the layman, however, will be Mr. Thompson's disclosure that the pelican does not "store in that beak enough food for a week," nor, indeed, any food at all. When the pelican has made its catch, he says, it swallows it all and flies home with the

fish "in ballast." At the nesting-ground it regurgitates the mess into its pouch, yawns widely, and permits its hungry young to dive deep into the parental "nosebag" for their semi-predigested meal. Messy, perhaps, from our point of view; but if the little pelicans like it

that way, what business is it of ours?

It really is a bit of a disappointment, however, to have it revealed that the pelican's pouch is not a field-haversack but only a loosely looped domestic tablecloth!

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ANTHROPOLOGY

Homo Sapiens May Be Ten Million Years Old

HOMO SAPIENS or man as we know him has lived longer on the face of the earth than science has hitherto supposed. He rose from among the other primates toward the geologic age known as Miocene. This makes him some 10,000,000 years old.

Discussion on man's place among the primates presented to the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in London indicate that scientific opinion based on new facts and researches tends to the acceptance of these ideas.

The Oxford anatomist, Prof. W. Le Gros Clark, emphasized the paramount importance of American research on the anatomy of the foot and explained that Dr. Dudley J. Morton of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University, New York, finds in the structure of the foot the strong suggestion that the human stock diverged from the anthropoid line of evolution when the common ancestors of man and other primates were little larger than the modern gibbon, a relatively small animal to be seen in most zoological gardens and belonging to the same Simiidae family as the chimpanzee, gorilla and orangutan.

Neandertal Not Intermediate

The Neandertal man, whose remains have been found plentifully in Europe, is no longer regarded as intermediate in evolution from the troglodyte apes, and man's resemblance to the gorilla is not attributed to the accident of parallel evolution upward from a remote common ancestor.

Of great interest to those who are attempting to puzzle out man's origin, is the espousal by Sir G. Elliot Smith, the British authority, of Dr. J. S. B. Leakey's conclusion that the anthropoids branched from the parent stem as early

as the Oligocene epoch, the geologic time preceding the Miocene. Dr. Leakey has investigated extensively fossil beds abounding in animal remains near the shores of Lake Victoria in Kenya, East Africa, and he offered his discoveries, Kanam and Kanjera men, as very early types of humans.

A New Niche

Dr. William K. Gregory of the American Museum of Natural History joined with Prof. G. Pinkley of London University in putting the Wadjak man, discovered in Java in 1889, into a new niche in human pre-history. This human type is known from a few fossils collected by Dr. Eugene Dubois, also "father" of the famous Pithecanthropus ape-man of Java. Dr. Dubois considered Wadjak man as a forerunner of the modern aboriginal Australians; but Prof. Pinkley concluded from a study of the teeth that Wadjak man, instead, foreshadows the Mediterranean type of man, who has played a much more important part in the world as we know it today.

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FIGHTING PLANT DISEASES

an address by

F. C. Meier

Principal Pathologist of the Bureau of Plant Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture

Wednesday, Aug. 15, at 3:30 p. m., Eastern Standard Time, over Stations of the Columbia Broadcasting System. Each week a prominent scientist speaks over the Columbia System under the auspices of Science Service.