

RADIO

Big-Name Talent May "Freeze" Television Advances

Analogous Situation Held up Phonograph Improvements For Many Years; FCC Urges Caution in Buying Sets Now

DESPITE Federal Communications Commission warning that the new limited-commercial operation of sponsored television programs after next September 1 must not be regarded as any attempt to "freeze" the technical advances of the art, there is some reason to believe that such a "freeze" will nevertheless be accomplished by the television public itself.

Commercial television broadcasting next fall will be on 441-line screen pictures, demonstrated recently to the FCC by the Radio Corporation of America technical staff.

Since that RCA show, the Philco Television Corporation and other smaller companies have been showing television pictures of 605-line screen and better in an attempt to prove that the present is no time to fix standards and freeze on 441-line screen for picture detail.

Here is how the limited commercial television operation next fall may tend to "freeze" television at 441-line screens for an indeterminate length of time, as told to Science Service by a television engineer of one of the smaller independent television companies.

RCA, with its close links with the National Broadcasting Company, would be pretty certain to be able to put on television programs with its great mass of "name," radio talent. These television shows would be good and would catch and hold the television audience because of superior talent. The other, smaller television broadcasting companies would do their best to get good talent, too, but in the last analysis the talent available to RCA ought to be the best. The situation might end up so that television set owners would rather look at some television "Charlie McCarthy" on 441-line pictures than see a lesser known character on 605-line pictures.

It is recalled that in the early days of the phonograph a somewhat similar situation existed which "froze" recording techniques for many years. The original phonograph system of Thomas Edison used vertical—or what is now called "hill and dale"—methods of recording on wax.

The phonograph put out by Victor

used lateral, or sidewise, variations for recording. Edison had a good system, but the system which won commercial success was Victor because it hired Caruso and the great names of the musical world to record for it. It was the public's demand for name talent which "froze" technical improvement for years. Only recently has the old Edison system of "hill and dale" come back into prominence, because of its excellent tone fidelity.

This line of reasoning is frankly only speculation at the present time. A final test can be answered only after the coming commercial television programs are on the air and an assay of the television audience reaction can be ascertained.

The FCC, in announcing the new limited commercial television permission, seeks to forestall any such freezing of receiving and transmission systems on 441-line screen detail. The FCC admits

that television may be on the threshold of significant technical advances in the art and warns the buying public that only those who can take the financial risk of buying a television set that may shortly be obsolete should take the jump. At the same time the FCC believes that present television is acceptable to the public and that without an actual period of commercial operation the whole question of research on television program material can not be studied.

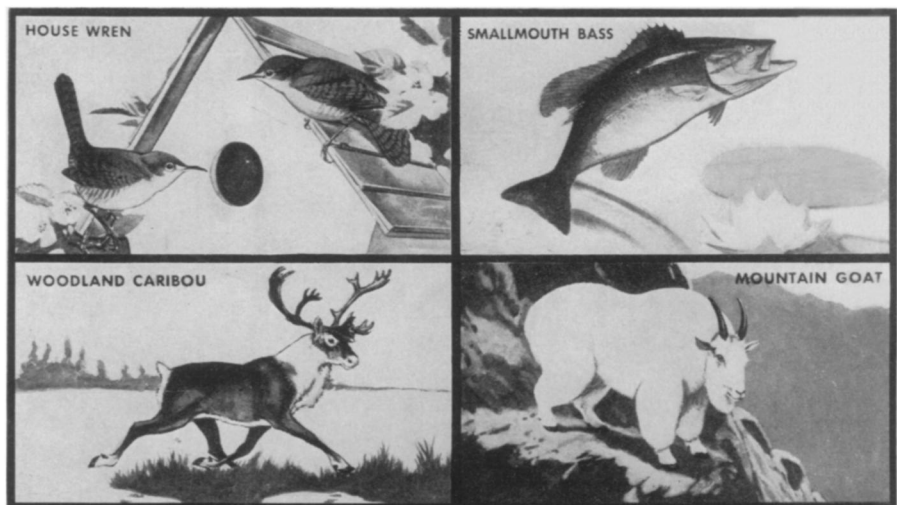
Science News Letter, March 16, 1940

ASTRONOMY—PHYSICS

New Infra-Red Apparatus Will Observe Eclipse

NEW knowledge of the composition of the sun should be secured from observations which will be made during the "ring eclipse" of the sun that will occur on April 7, according to Dr. Otto Struve, professor of astrophysics at the University of Chicago and director of both the new McDonald Observatory on Mt. Locke, Texas, operated jointly by the University of Texas and the University of Chicago, and Chicago's Yerkes Observatory.

Usually a "ring eclipse", in which the moon's diameter is not of apparent sufficient size to obscure completely the sun's disk and produce a total eclipse, is



NEW WILDLIFE STAMPS

"Restore Your Outdoors" is the exhortation borne by each stamp in this year's wildlife series, which is just being placed on sale by the National Wildlife Federation, proceeds to be used in research aimed at the rebuilding of America's once great resources of big and small game, birds, fish, forest trees and wildflowers. Four outstanding designs are reproduced above: wrens, most neighborly of birds; small-mouth bass, favorite of fishermen; woodland caribou, now nearly extinct in this country but hopeful of a comeback; mountain goat, wild and wily dweller of the craggy heights.