ECOLOGY

NATURE RAMBLINGS
by Frank Thone

The Prairies Remember

DROUGHT of the mid-1930's has receded so far into the past that it is nearly forgotten by most of us. But the prairies remember. Thousands of acres in the eastern third of Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas have had their grass cover changed radically—and for the worse, says Prof. J. E. Weaver, veteran University of Nebraska botanist.

The normal, undisturbed prairies in this region are dominated by bluestem grass species. This group of grasses, however, does not withstand drought as well as the lower-growing but tougher western wheat grass. During the thirsty years, much of the bluestem cover died out, and its place was taken by the wheat grass, which still persists.

Western wheat grass is less desirable than the bluestems, for several reasons. Of immediate economic importance is the fact that it yields smaller amounts of less nutritious feed, and hence can support fewer head of livestock on a given area. The range therefore still suffers the effects of drought, half-a-dozen years after the return of better moisture conditions.

Western wheat grass also has bad effects on the soil. It is an early-starting type of grass, and very greedy for moisture, so that it has a tendency to suck the soil dry of snow-melt and early rain water, thereby stunting and suppressing other more desirable plant species not quite so prompt in seizing the moisture supply. Soil samples taken within wheat-grass areas show from 3% to 13% less moisture than similar samples taken just outside them.

Furthermore, little ground cover of dead leaves, stems and other debris accumulates under wheat grass. This lets falling rain strike directly on bare soil, roiling the water and soon clogging the soil pores. This reduces the amount of water soaking down into the soil and increases runoff.

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GENERAL SCIENCE

Chinese Scientists on West Coast Organize

SCIENTIFIC workers in China and the United States have clasped hands across the Pacific through the organization of the United States West Coast Chapter of the Chinese Natural Science Association.

A number of Chinese scientists and technical students in Southern California have organized this new scientific society as a part of the Chinese Natural Science Association with headquarters at Chungking, China. The aim of this new organization, as announced by Dr. T. T. Chen of the University of California at Los Angeles, is the advancement of study and research in the natural sciences and the attainment of greater cooperation.

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