

BOTANY  
**NATURE  
 RAMBLINGS**  
*by Frank Thone*



**Sneeze-Stimulators**

► **HAYFEVER** victims begin sneezing and sniffing early in spring, and keep it up until a plant-killing frost cuts off the supply of misery-bringing pollen. There are, however, two crescendos in the annual chorus of involuntary explosions. The first (and lesser) coincides with the blossoming of grasses and the narrow-leaved plantain; the second (and worst) comes with the mass shedding of pollen by the ragweeds. Many innocent flowers are falsely accused, and some troublemakers escape unsuspected.

A new summing-up of all available evidence has just been published in book form by a botanist who has made hayfever pollens and the plants that produce them the subject of his life research, Dr. Roger P. Wodehouse (*Hayfever Plants*: Chronica Botanica Company). In it he lists not only the plants known to be the chief sinners against the peace of the human nose, but the lesser offenders also; and he performs a service for innocent suspects by showing up the paucity of the evidence.

Only half-a-dozen herbaceous families harbor hayfever weeds: grasses, composites (notably the ragweeds, of course), chenopods, pigweeds, plantains and docks. And there are only eight families of woody plants whose pollen makes nasal linings swell and eyes turn red; they range from birches and beeches through maples and ashes.

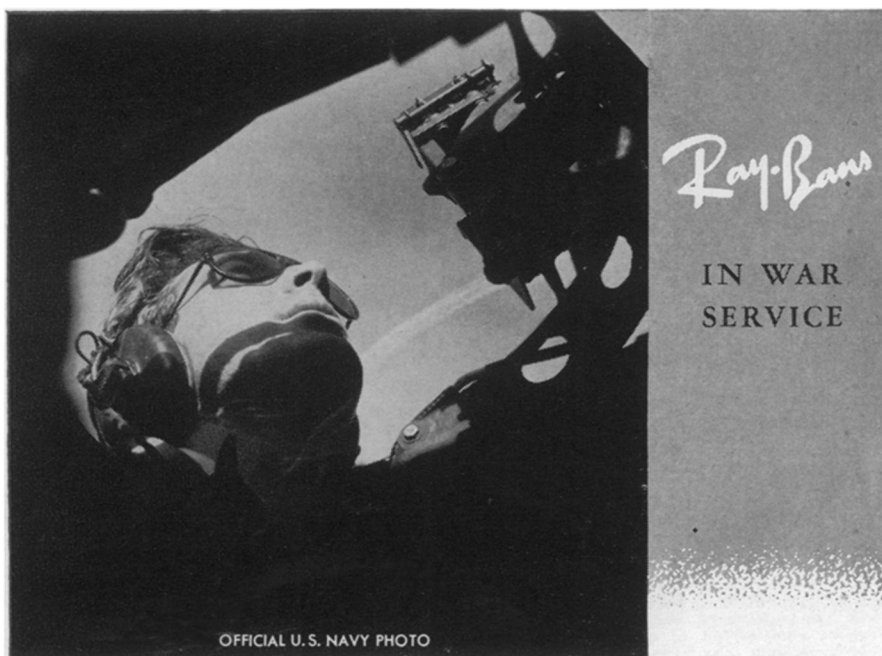
Even within any given family there are usually only a few irritating members. Thus, among the cockleburs, closely related to the ragweeds, only one or two species produce enough pollen to be worth bothering about. Again, while the English or narrow-leaved plantain is per-

haps the worst of the provokers of early hayfever, its two nearest relatives in this country figure hardly at all in it.

Mere abundance of wind-carried pollen does not suffice to convict a plant as an offender. Dr. Wodehouse points out that the whole great group of conifers—the pines, spruces, firs, etc.—cast enormous quantities of pollen to the winds every spring, yet only the sub-group comprising the junipers, cypresses and their

immediate kin, are known to be really troublesome hayfever causes. Again, while several grass species make many sneezes, the abundant pollens of sedges and cattails seems to be quite innocent. A pollen must be not only abundant and wind-borne, but specifically capable of causing the peculiar kind of poisoning known as allergy, to rate a place in the hayfever rogues' gallery.

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