

Do You Know?

Birds eat at least half their own weight in food daily.

Wild *bison* could smell water five miles away, it is said.

Only about one-third of the *wood* in a tree is now converted into usable products.

Jimson weed is a fence-corner relative of the potato and the tomato and several other useful crop plants of the family Solanaceae.

A bag of *silica gel* stored with the household crackers and breakfast cereals will keep them crisp and edible in humid weather.

More than 15,000 groups of *sunspots* have been recorded since 1873; 25 of these were conspicuous when viewed by the naked eye through dark glasses.

Some *hermit crabs* live in water, some along the shore; both kinds vary in size from those with shells hardly larger than the head of a pin to others of grapefruit size.

The common *cowpea*, also known as the blackeye pea or the blackeye bean, provides popular human food in its seed and valuable feed for cattle in the plant itself; when plowed under the plant enriches the soil.

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PUBLIC HEALTH

Polio in Florida

This state has almost four times as many cases this year as in 1945. But only 56 cases of the disease were reported for the entire nation the week of May 11.

► TEXANS seem to have gotten excited over an increase in infantile paralysis cases, but Florida is the spot national health authorities are more inclined to view with concern over signs of an impending outbreak of the disease.

Latest reports to the U. S. Public Health Service show that for the week ending May 11, Texas had 16 cases of polio while Florida had 17. Since the first of the year, Texas has had 63 cases compared with Florida's 98. That gives Florida almost four times as many cases this year as in 1945, while the Texas figure for the year so far is only nine cases more than the previous year. Texas, like California, has for the past several years had what health authorities call "a good deal of residual polio," meaning that a good many cases occur long after the polio season has elsewhere closed in the fall and before it starts up in the summer.

Clean-up campaigns such as have been started in Texas are not likely to stop an infantile paralysis epidemic, if one is coming, though such campaigns are good in themselves. Flies have been shown capable of carrying the infantile paralysis virus but there is no valid evidence that they play a part in spreading the disease or causing epidemics. The same is true of unsanitary conditions. Infantile paralysis virus has been found in sewage and in bowel discharges of patients, but there is no valid evidence that it spreads, as typhoid fever does, through sewage-contaminated water.

Only 56 cases of infantile paralysis were reported for the entire nation for the week of May 11. This includes the Texas and Florida cases.

The only real hope of preventing infantile paralysis lies in the development of a protective vaccine, Dr. H. E. Van Riper, assistant medical director of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, declared in discussing the situation.

No such vaccine exists at present although scientists are trying to develop one.

Hope of protecting children from po-

lio by injections of material from blood as they can now be protected against measles by such material is very slim. Such antipolio substances have been found in blood, Dr. Joseph Stokes, Jr., of Philadelphia reported at the meeting of the American College of Physicians in that city.

Difficulties in using it, even for a trial, are many, he pointed out. It would take enormous quantities of blood, since it might be necessary to give children repeated injections throughout the summer, and the amount of the material in a pint of blood is very small. There are different strains of polio virus, just as there are of influenza virus, and even large pools of blood plasma might not contain the strains needed for protection in a given epidemic. Finally, the demands of frantic parents to have their children included if they knew trials of such a procedure were under way might make it impossible for the trials to continue or to give any real information on the value of the procedure.

Science News Letter, May 25, 1946

Drilling for oil will soon be resumed in northern Cebu in the Philippines; prewar uncompleted drilling gave encouraging indications of oil.

Over 20,000 acres of waxy *endosperm corn* is being grown in Iowa this year; it is a very new crop for America, raised to replace imports of tapioca and other starches from the East Indies.

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