

ORNITHOLOGY

Vertical Flight Is Nothing New to Ducks**See Front Cover**

► DUCKS may well look down scornful beaks at helicopters; vertical flight is nothing new to them. As demonstrated in the high-speed photograph of the mallard drake shown on the cover of this SCIENCE NEWS LETTER, a duck in a hurry to take off from the water goes right straight up for several feet before it begins to level off into horizontal flight.

The take-off actually starts in the water rather than on it. The bird's body is about one-third submerged, and the wings make one or two strokes into the water. Doubtless this action against a more resistant medium than air helps greatly in that first upward leap.

The cover photograph is one of several hundred that illustrate a sumptuous new book, *Prairie Wings*, in which both photography and text are by Edgar M. Queeny, with explanatory sketches by Richard E. Bishop, published by Ducks Unlimited, Inc. The artist-author is connected with the Monsanto Chemical Company; ducks are his serious hobby. It is more than just a book of magnificent duck pictures; in it a serious effort is made to understand the flight maneuvers of ducks in terms of what we know about aerodynamics.

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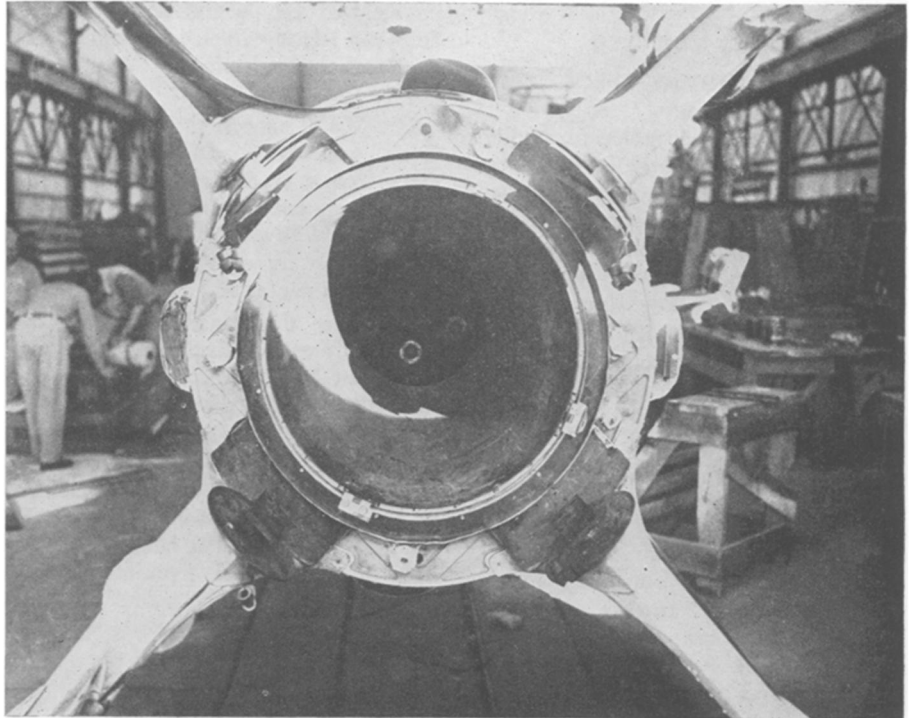
GENERAL SCIENCE

Prof. Joseph Proudman Wins Alexander Agassiz Medal

► THE NATIONAL Academy of Sciences awarded one of its highest honors, the Alexander Agassiz medal, to an English researcher on the mathematics of the oceans' tides, Prof. Joseph Proudman, F. R. S., director of the Liverpool Observatory and Tidal Institute. Since Prof. Proudman was unable to be present in person, the medal was accepted in his behalf by Sir Alfred Egerton, secretary of the Royal Society of London.

Two Americans were also presented with medals of the Academy. The Daniel Giraud Elliot Medal went to Dr. George Gaylord Simpson, paleontologist of the American Museum of Natural History. The Mary Clark Thompson medal was given to Dr. John B. Reeside, Jr., of the U. S. Geological Survey, whose field of research has been the Mesozoic of the central United States.

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V-2 ROCKET STERN—This projectile was sent aloft recently at White Sands, New Mex., to take automatic pictures at high altitudes. Arranged around the exhaust are six airplane gun type cameras. Official U. S. Navy photograph.

ARCHAEOLOGY

First New World Realists

► THE EARLIEST New World realists in art were the sculptors who 2,000 years ago carved the colossal stone heads unearthed in tropical lowlands of southern Mexico, Dr. Matthew W. Stirling, chief of the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of Ethnology, told the Smithsonian's 100th anniversary convocation in Washington.

Five gigantic human heads were found during the past digging season. Dr. Stirling explained that the 11 heads found so far are the best preserved of all the stone monuments found in the Western hemisphere.

The same early Americans, who flourished before the time of Christ, invented the New World calendar which was adopted and complicated by the Mayas, with the earliest of whom the La Venta people were contemporary.

Two of the great stone heads discovered this year at San Lorenzo are each nine feet high. Some of the heads discovered earlier are being moved to Mexico City by the Mexican govern-

ment for permanent exhibition there.

The heads are so realistic and true to life that Dr. Stirling told an audience of world-famous academicians from many foreign countries that they are undoubtedly good portraits of what the early La Ventans actually looked like.

Later the Mayas developed a more gaudy and stylistic type of stone art, with an evident aversion to any blank spaces on their monuments which they covered with decorations. Dr. Stirling called this a mark of artistic degeneration.

The earliest date in the New World is the one corresponding to 31 B. C., carved on a monument from the Tres Zapotes site.

Eight years of archaeological exploration by a joint expedition of the Smithsonian Institution and the National Geographic Society, directed by Dr. Stirling, unearthed the new evidences of the La Venta culture, called Olmec in earlier reports. (See SNL, July 27, 1946.)

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