



Usefulness of Bats

► IF BATS FLEW in the daytime instead of at night, if they sang sweetly instead of merely squeaking, if they looked less like winged mice—in short, if bats were birds, doubtless people would like them better. Yet even in their unloved, hobgoblin form, bats are highly useful animals, rivalling, or rather supplementing, birds in their role as insect-catchers.

At a recent meeting of the National Speleological Society, Charles E. Mohr of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia called attention to the economic importance of bats. Many people already know that bats destroy enormous quantities of insects, especially moths, insects and beetles. However, one important angle may have been overlooked: since bats fly at night, when most insect-eating birds are asleep, they take toll of nocturnal insects that would otherwise escape.

All species of bats in this country are insectivorous, and may therefore be rated as "good" animals from the human point of view. We do not have the shudder-causing vampire bats or the orchard-raiding fruit bats of the tropics in our cooler regions, so the aura of wickedness that has somehow attached itself to bats really doesn't fit, so far as the United States is concerned.

Bats' insect-destroying activities, like birds', have sometimes been overrated. It is unlikely that any insect species has been destroyed, or is even kept down to minimal numbers, by either bats or birds. Our living insect-traps, whether their wings be leathern or feathered, are useful but are not the final answers to insect pest problems. For this reason, the much-publicized bat roosts that were erected a

couple of decades ago, were foredoomed to failure in their mission as mosquito-control devices.

Bats have a positive economic importance as well as the negative one of insect destruction. As fish-eating birds leave heavy deposits of guano, valuable as fertilizer, on their island rookeries, so bats build up accumulations of guano on the floors of their cavern roosting-places. Mr. Mohr stated that something like \$500,000 worth of guano has been taken out of Carlsbad Caverns alone. And during the War of 1812 and the Civil War, bat-guano deposits in Southern caves were important sources of saltpeter, necessary ingredient of black powder.

Science News Letter, March 8, 1947

GENERAL SCIENCE

Scientific Talent Doesn't Follow Parents' Occupation

► SCIENTIFIC promise in young people has no discernible relation to what their parents do, it is disclosed by a study of the parentage of the 40 winners in the Sixth Annual Science Talent Search who gathered in Washington for the five-day Science Talent Institute.

Businessmen and lawyers are among the fathers of the young men and women who represent the cream of this year's scientific crop among high school graduates, but others list paternal occupations as laborer, electrician, carpenter, tailor. Numerically the occupations are listed as: eight businessmen, six teachers, three engineers, three lawyers, two investment brokers. The following occupations are represented by one father each: clergyman, publisher, composer, tailor, carpenter, biologist, laborer, electrician, plant quarantine inspector, well driller, motion picture writer.

All mothers listed are homemakers, but some are able to carry on full-time jobs as well. Four of the mothers are teachers, and one each is occupied as dietitian, advertising director, editor, bookkeeper, factory worker.

Six of the winners have only one parent living. Ten of the 40 are only children; 20 have at least one brother or sister. Only one comes from a family with as many as four children. About 17% have parents who attended college.

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Nose-prints of dogs correspond to finger-prints of men; veterinarians say that every dog's nose is different, and that their nose-prints are reliable for identifying valuable animals.

OPTICS

Infra-Red Rays Used To Examine Eyes

► EXAMINING HUMAN eyes with invisible infra-red rays appears to be a new use for this type of radiation.

The instrument and method used was described to the American Optical Society meeting in New York by Dr. M. J. Koomen and Dr. R. Tousey, with the U. S. Naval Research Laboratory, and Dr. H. A. Knoll, now at the Ohio State University but formerly with the Naval Laboratory.

The advantage of using this invisible infra-red "light" is that it does not disturb the eye under observation as do rays from ordinary light. The reflected rays form an image which is made visible to the observer by use of a telescope similar to those used on Army sniper-scopes.

The sniper-scope, attached to a rifle, shot out infra-red beams which were reflected back by an enemy prowling in the dark, clearly outlining him in the receiving telescope. In examining the eye, the ray is used to measure the pupil, and the instrument is called an infra-red pupillometer.

With this device, the eye pupil appears dark and the iris bright. A lighted scale within it becomes superimposed upon both pupil and iris in such a way that it is possible to measure the pupil with considerable accuracy. The accuracy is limited largely to involuntary fluctuations and movements of the eye.

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