

Hundreds of species of birds, insects and plants flourish in the wide climatic range. The geology of Iraq is of primary importance because of the vast reserves of revenue-producing oil.

The first zoological collections were made in 1918 by the members of a British Expeditionary Force. The specimens were identified at the British Museum, where the majority of the type collections from southwestern Asia are to be found.

In 1927-1928, as leader of the Field Museum North Arabian Desert Expedition and again in 1934, I collected many series of animals and plants, now in Chicago.

However, it has long been obvious that a natural history museum should be founded in Baghdad so that not only specimens could be centralized, but also publications could be issued in Arabic and English. I discussed this general outline in 1934 with the late King Ghazi, who showed an enthusiastic response.

In 1946, the Regent opened the Natural History Museum with zoological, botanical and geological sections, as well as a room devoted to the study of evolution. The director, Dr. Bashir E. Allouse, has just published "A HANDLIST OF THE BIRDS OF IRAQ" so that the Iraq government is now for the first time sponsoring scientific research and publications.

In the garden of the museum, under a date palm, about 20 turtles swim around or rest in the shade. These were collected by us in Kurdistan and presented by the Peabody Museum-Harvard Expedition.

Thus science has come back to a nation which 2,500 years ago led the world in mathematics and astronomical research.

Ancient "Whodunnit" Tackled

NIMRUD, IRAQ—Evidence of what may have been an unsolved murder committed 3,500 years ago was just unearthed at Nimrud, near Mosul, Iraq, when the skeletons of two young boys were found buried under the floors of a room in King Ashurnasirpal's palace.

Solution of this ancient "Whodunnit" has been undertaken by Agatha Christie, mystery story writer, who, as wife of Prof.



Grasshoppers

➤ IN Aesop's fable of the ant and the grasshopper the ant is made out to be sober, conscientious, and hard-working, with a provident eye for the rigorous winter ahead. The grasshopper is painted as a frivolous idler who fiddles the summer away with no care for the morrow.

Actually Aesop was more of a moralist than a naturalist. As a tale-teller with an axe to grind, Aesop may also have harbored an unwitting prejudice against a creature endowed with a built-in musical instrument. For grasshoppers, although far from idle, do produce a rhythmic sound that is enchanting or irksome, depending on your point of view.

The male grasshopper can fiddle or keep silent at will. When it feels like sounding off, it rubs the inside of the hind legs

against the wings, producing a rasping or crackling sound. It can do this one leg at a time or both together. The female is unable to fiddle.

Katydid and crickets, which are closely related to grasshoppers, are even more musical. They produce a louder tone and a more varied phrase. Their songs, with day and night variations, have been written down in musical notation. It might be an interesting experiment to go out into the fields with a violin and play the katydid song and see what kind of back-talk you provoked.

But grasshoppers are neither all music nor all frivolity. Their business in life is to eat and to reproduce, and they allow their fiddling to interfere with neither. Grasshoppers are vegetarians, and sometimes when they become extremely numerous they move forward in great swarms, ruining crops and devastating the countryside. The locust plagues described in the Bible were caused by a species of grasshopper.

If grasshoppers sometimes show a partiality for the same foods that man likes, man has frequently returned the compliment in a lefthanded sort of way by feeding in turn on the grasshoppers themselves. In many parts of the world roasted grasshoppers are eaten as a food. The Japanese have found that they are even more nutritious than fish.

Some American Indians used to eat grasshoppers, and at least one contemporary American naturalist, Wilfrid S. Bronson, has broiled and eaten them out of scientific curiosity. He says they taste like lobster.

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Max Mallowan, is one of the technical staff of the expedition sponsored by the British School of Archaeology. On this problem she will have to work without the aid of her detective master mind, mustachioed Hercule Poirot.

Finding the bones of the two boys hidden in the royal palace was reminiscent of the death of the two little princes in the Tower of London. Mrs. Agatha Christie Mallowan regards the problems of unraveling the past more fascinating than modern mystery fiction.

Other rooms, halls and passages of this palace were decorated with winged bulls and lions and long, inscribed texts in cuneiform which listed the many titles of King Ashurnasirpal. It was this king who, about 330 B.C., restored what was then Calah and now is Nimrud, as capital of Assyria. In Nimrud, Prof. Mallowan and his staff have excavated great winged bulls weighing many tons.

In Nimrud also was found the site of what was probably the world's first and largest zoo. Here the kings of Assyria kept thousands of animals. Visitors came from near and far to see the curious animals from Asia and Africa. Particularly

popular then, just as in the modern zoos today, were the trumpeting elephants.

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INVENTION

Milking Chore Eliminated: Device Holds Cow's Tail

➤ COWTAIL holder, on which the government recently issued a patent, will ease the job of the hand milker in fly-time and eliminate the small-boy former chore of holding the tail while daddy draws the milk. Farm-raised city men, as well as present cow owners, will appreciate this device.

It is a simple gadget with two arms pivoted in the center like ordinary shears. A spring between the handle ends to the rear hold the jaws of the forward part closed. To use, these jaws are opened, the hairy part of the tail inserted between pads, then closed on the cow's leg. The jaws hold firmly but without disturbing the composure of the animal.

The inventor is Albert J. Kline, New Douglas, Ill. For his efforts he received patent 2,513,494.

Science News Letter, August 5, 1950

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