

ZOOLOGY  
**NATURE RAMBLINGS**



**Woodchuck**

➤ THIS is the time of year when you finally expect to learn how much wood a woodchuck really chucks, assuming the pesky animal could chuck wood after spending all summer digging tunnels through your garden.

The answer is, "Not any." As a timber handler, the woodchuck is a decided flop. He bothers himself not at all in laying in a winter's supply of fire wood, for he has a much better way to keep warm. By dint of all the vegetables he has pilfered, he is a veritable butter-ball by the time frost begins to sting his ears. His layers of fat will insulate him from the cold and supply enough energy to stay alive until another spring brings a new crop of good things to eat.

It is amazing the fine, resounding reputation the woodchuck has built up for himself. Not only is he considered a lumberjack of the Paul Bunyan school, but under an alias, the groundhog, he is presumed to be an infallible weather prognosticator. Each year on Feb. 2 his opinion on the amount of winter remaining is eagerly sought. Yet there is no authentic case on record of his ever having paid attention to his shadow, even when it was in plain sight. "Groundhog" forecasts might just as well be made by flipping a coin.

The woodchuck, or groundhog, or marmot—call him what you please—is one of the medium-sized rodents, kin to the rabbit and the rat. He has, however, neither the long ears of the rabbit nor the long tail of the rat. He resembles instead his other cousin the guinea-pig.

It is surprising how many rodents are given false positions in the pig pen by colloquial nomenclature—groundhog, guinea-pig, and porcupine for examples. The woodchuck seems to have been given a double pig-christening for "chuck" is an English country dialect word meaning a small pig or shoat.

Although there is no connection in zoology's family tree, the woodchuck does vie with his ham-and-bacon namesakes as an eater and sleeper. He breakfasts heavily, lunches moderately and dines inordinately

on the most appetizing green stuff that he can find. After sleeping from dusk to dawn, he takes a long nap in the morning and a shorter one in the afternoon.

Then, as winter approaches, he retires with a yawn and settles down to a real sleep. Like most of his rodent relatives, the woodchuck is a burrower, though not at all a particular one. Once he has dug a home he sleeps in it, rather than expending any effort in improving it. Why worry about wallpaper in a bedroom, when all one is planning to do is sleep in it.

Science News Letter, October 14, 1950

**NUCLEAR PHYSICS**

**Michigan Atomic Energy Project Self-Financed**

➤ THE UNIVERSITY of Michigan's atomic energy project just inaugurated is unique because it has not sought government money, although it has enthusiastic best wishes from the Atomic Energy Commission.

Called the Phoenix Project, this name for the privately financed research into the atom's physics, chemistry, medicine and human problems as well, came rather spontaneously from the Michigan student body when they heard of the plans.

The phoenix of Egyptian mythology was a sacred bird which burned itself upon the altar and rose again from its ashes young and beautiful. In the searing of our civilization through the threat of atomic energy used for destruction, the Michigan Phoenix project may raise something peaceful and useful from the threatened damage.

To the thousands of scientists working for the government directly or indirectly on secret and non-secret research, the Phoenix project will add a small body of experts who attack atomic problems from without the necessary framework of the government organization.

Chairman Gordon Dean of the AEC emphasized in a speech at Ann Arbor the attention that will be paid to social, economic and ethical problems by the Phoenix project.

Science News Letter, October 14, 1950

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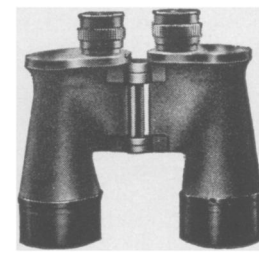
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