

ENTOMOLOGY

Grasshopper Damage Spreads to East

► THE STRUGGLE between insects and men quickened as reports of crop damage by grasshoppers on the East Coast added to concern over increasing grasshopper numbers in the West and Midwest.

In New Jersey, Delaware and Virginia counties, grasshoppers are numerous. Up to 126 hoppers per hundred sweeps were found in Virginia alfalfa fields, while Delaware soybeans are being attacked in several areas of the state.

Grasshoppers continue to do their greatest damage west of the Mississippi, a report of insect pest conditions by the U.S. Department of Agriculture showed. In New Mexico, they are overrunning cultivated crops in Mora County, while 500,000 acres of rangeland in Union County are infested.

West central areas of Wisconsin are showing 25 grasshoppers per square yard, while 45,000 acres in Utah and 150,000 acres in Washington are reported "severely infested." Barley, wheat and safflower are being invaded from adjoining rangeland in Washington.

In the counterattack, 20,000 acres in Utah have been brought under control, and in Nevada, a severe infestation in Spring Valley has been reduced to 200 acres. In Oklahoma, grasshoppers have been kept under control over 150,000 acres in four counties.

Unexpected aid came to farmers fighting grasshoppers in Clay County and other west central areas of Missouri. Grasshoppers there have been attacked by a fungus disease that is effectively reducing their numbers.

Science News Letter, August 6, 1955

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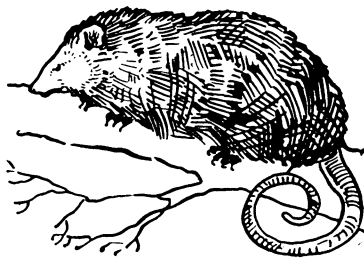
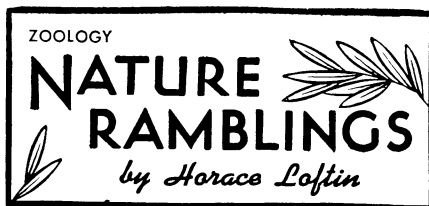
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The Kangaroo's Cousin

► MOTHER NATURE must have been in a humorous mood when she fashioned that unlikely creature, the opossum.

In overall appearance, it looks something like an outsized rat whose hair has just been washed and who can't do a thing with it. A little closer look shows the 'possum to have front feet resembling a squirrel's and hind feet with an opposable thumb, such as is found in man and apes.

And his fixed grin reminds you of Alice's Cheshire cat.

Then where is the opossum's place on the family tree of animal life? Right along with the kangaroos and wallabies and bandicoots of Australia, in the family of pouched animals, the marsupials.

Opossums, like their distant cousins the kangaroos, carry their young in pouches until they are old enough to fend for themselves. When the young are born, they are scarcely more than crawling embryos, so small that 20 of them will fit comfortably in a teaspoon.

Naturalists have found that it takes only about 13 days after mating for the young to be born. Thus, opossums have the shortest time between fertilization and birth known among the mammals. Runners-up are hamsters, 16 days, and mice with 21 days.

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Just before the young are born, the mother usually licks her pouch to clean it in preparation for her litter. This habit probably gave rise to the folk-tale that 'possums deliver their babies and place them in the pouch through their nose.

Actually, the minute opossum babies find their own way into the pouch, clambering up their mother's abdomen. They crawl into the pouch and fasten to one of the mother's several breasts. They may stay in the pouch for from 50 to 60 days until they are large enough to care for themselves.

Today, pouched animals, or marsupials, are found only in North and South America, Australia and Tasmania, and a few islands to the north of them. This was not always so, for in prehistoric times they were found over all the land masses of the earth. Fossil marsupials have been discovered in the gypsum paving the streets of Paris.

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Questions

BIOCHEMISTRY—How does the body chemistry of Chinese differ from that of Caucasians? p. 88.

CRIMINOLOGY—How is bourbon like scopalamine? p. 82.

GEOPHYSICS—What are "blobs" of air? p. 87.

TECHNOLOGY—Why does freezing hold promise as a low-cost method of making fresh water from salt water? p. 90.

VITAL STATISTICS—What is the year's most dangerous season? p. 87.

ZOOLOGY—How can life expectancy of caribou be judged? p. 82.

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