Scientists to Cross Worst Desert

Zoology Geography

A motor caravan of scientists will soon attack the Kalahari desert, rated as the world's worst dry spot. Although not as extensive as the Sahara, it is more arid, and its borders are haunted by untamed native tribes hostile to all strangers. But the Vernay-Lang expedition of the Field Museum of Natural History expects to traverse it and to explore the neighboring lands along the Botletle River, the Chobe swamps and the British protectorate of Bechuanaland.

The plans for the expedition were announced by Stephen C. Simms, director of the Field Museum. Arthur S. Vernay, an experienced big-game hunter, will sail for England December 28. He will leave Southampton for Capetown on January 31. From there he will proceed to Francistown in the interior, where he will be joined by Herbert Lang, a former New Yorker, who has become one of the best known of South African explorers. At Francistown the personnel of the expedition will be assembled and the party will fare forth into the desert.

Their principal object will be to seek new and rare species of animals and birds, to add to the world's stock of zoological knowledge. Two of the known but scarce species sought are the giant sable antelope, one of the rarest of hoofed mammals, and the honey bird.

The honey bird is a creature of almost mythical behavior. African travelers state that when one of them sees a human being it whistles to attract attention, and then leads the way to a tree where wild bees have hived. It sits by while its human friends chop down the tree and take their fill of honey, and then proceeds to feast on the comb that is left, and especially on the young bee grubs.

After leaving the desert the party will pass through the country of the Barotse, one of the most interesting of African tribes. Among them spitting is not "bad form" but good religion, being the best method of warding off evil spirits. This tribe also shuns contact with undesirable denizens of the other world by decking their heads with hares' tails, ducks' feet and ostrich plumes.

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Gorillas, Like Men, All One Species

Zoology

Like their more successful and more widespread human cousins, the gorillas of equatorial Africa are all members of one species. Within the species they can be definitely differentiated into two zoological varieties, called for convenience the coast and the mountain varieties. Beyond this, all differences hitherto described can not be made out as anything more than local and probably fluctuating and impermanent.

These conclusions are set forth by a young Harvard zoologist, Harold Jefferson Coolidge, Jr., in a monograph on this interesting genus just off the Harvard University Press. Mr. Coolidge has made an exhaustive study of all available skeletal material on the gorilla and has examined all the scientific literature in existence bearing on the question of its zoological position.

The first scientific description of the gorilla was published in 1847 by Dr. Thomas Savage and Dr. Jeffries Wyman, who regarded the animal as a new species of orang-utan. Later, its claim to recognition as a different genus was advanced, and many zoologists proceeded to split it up into a considerable number of different species. Of recent years, however, the tendency has been to reduce the number of species, and now Mr. Coolidge gets it back down to one, with two distinct subspecies.

The two varieties, coast and mountain gorillas, live in ranges separated from each other by a considerable stretch of territory in which there are apparently no gorillas at all. Thus isolated and prevented from interbreeding, each group has developed and preserved certain peculiarities of its own, most notably in the proportions of the skull. The coast gorilla has a skull that averages a little longer and wider than that of the mountain variety, but the mountain gorilla has a larger jaw and ampler mouth cavity than his lowland brother possesses.

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The first synthetic perfume, "essence of mirbane" was discovered in 1834, but it was not put into use until 1850.

The U. S. Navy has discontinued its carrier pigeon message service and vill use radio entirely.

Fight Infections

Surgery

Maggots, the tiny crawling larvae of blowflies, may prove to be of great value in preventing and checking wound infections. This new method of treating wounds which is now being investigated was developed from observations made during the World War by an American surgeon, Dr. William S. Baer, now clinical professor of orthopedic surgery at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

Dr. Baer noticed that when the wounded men had been lying out on the ground for some time before being brought to the dressing stations, their wounds were covered with tiny maggots, the larvae from which common flies develop. But these men, strangely enough, did not develop infections in their wounds, as did those whose wounds had been dressed and treated very soon after their infliction. The men who had been lying on the ground untreated the longest and who had the most maggots crawling on their wounds were the ones who did not develop any infections.

Further investigation of this unexpected state of affairs disclosed that the maggots were eating the dead tissues, bone and flesh, and thus destroying the material that would have furnished good breeding ground for bacteria. The bacteria which might have gotten into the wound and set up an infection were unable to exist in the wound which the maggots had cleaned up.

After the war Dr. Baer remembered the action of the maggots when he was treating children suffering from osteomyelitis. This disease is an inflammation of the bone, more common in children than in adults. It is the result of an infection and requires prompt surgical treatment. Recovery is often delayed for years if the disease reaches the chronic stage. In order to hasten the healing of the wound after operating on this condition, Dr. Baer has been using maggots with good results. The tiny creatures consumed all the dead tissue about the wound and the bacteria which had been causing the infection soon died from lack of sustenance.

The investigations along this line were abruptly halted during the first winter, when the cold weather killed the flies and so cut off the supply of maggots. Now, however, this contingency has ben provided for, and Dr. Baer has a plentiful all-year-round supply of the tiny creatures.

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