

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ZOO

By WILLIAM MANN

DIRECTOR, NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL PARK

“THE House did not report the same.”

This is from the report of the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution for the year ended June 30, 1889. “The same” was a request for \$5,000 for the care and maintenance of the United States National Museum’s department of living animals, of which William T. Hornaday was curator. The animals had come in as gifts to the government, and their number was increased during the following year by a trio of American elk sent by the Honorable W. F. Cody (better known as Buffalo Bill), of North Platte, Neb., 4 American bison from Dr. McGillycuddy of Rapid City, Dak., and gifts from various United States Army officers stationed in Texas.

Animals were accepted reluctantly. There was little place to keep them, and most of them were in an overcrowded, steam-heated temporary building, filled during visiting hours with enough sight-seers to make it uncomfortable. There was no appropriation wherewith to buy feed for the animals, and the limited funds of the Smithsonian had to be used. Some of the animals served as models for the taxidermists who were mounting North American animals for the National Museum and were afterward sent to the zoological gardens already established at Philadelphia or Cincinnati or to the New York Central Park menagerie.

The previous year, 1888, Senator Beck of Kentucky had brought before the Senate a bill for the formation of a zoological park. This did not pass. In 1889 a bill sponsored by Senator Edmond was passed for the establishment of a National Zoological Park in the District of Columbia for “the advancement of science and the instruction and recrea-

tion of the people,” and \$200,000 was appropriated to purchase and improve the site for the Zoo. A commission consisting of three persons was appointed; The Secretary of the Interior, the President of the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia, and the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.

This committee selected the site of the present Zoo,

. . . . a site in the picturesque valley of Rock Creek, in the portion nearest the city. Here not only the wild goats, the mountain sheep and their congeners would find rocky cliffs which are their natural home, but the beavers brooks in which to build their dams; the buffalo places of seclusion in which to breed, and replenish their dying race; aquatic birds and beasts their native homes, and in general all animals would be provided for on a site almost incomparably better than any now used for this purpose in any capital in the world (Letter from Secretary Langley to Congressman Samuel Dibble).

Largely featured in correspondence concerning the Park at that time was the preservation of North American animals on the verge of becoming extinct, especially the bison.

Mr. Hornaday resigned at the end of the year, and Dr. Frank Baker, honorary curator in the Department of Comparative Anatomy at the National Museum, was appointed as “Acting Manager” of the Park. Mr. W. H. Blackburne, of the animal department of the Barnum and Bailey Circus, was put in charge of the animals; he was given the title of Principal Keeper. He stayed 53 years and is still consultant to the Director.

A bridge was put over Rock Creek; destroyed by a freshet the following year, it was rebuilt immediately. Roads were made. In 1892 there was a deficiency appropriation of \$1,000 for the care and subsistence of animals, half to

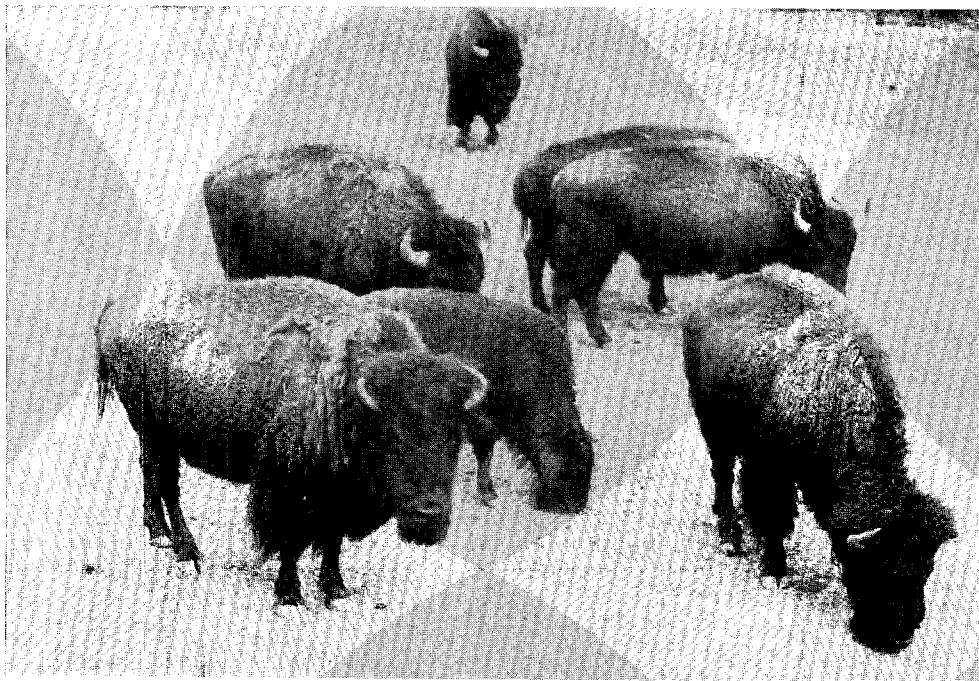
be paid by the treasury of the District of Columbia and half to come from the Treasury of the United States. The annual report for that year gave the first census of the collection of 406 specimens.

A firm of landscape architects, Olmsted and Eliot, was engaged to plan improvements in the Park, and land was added, a few acres at a time, purchased from different owners. Mr. H. P. Wagonman made a gift of over an acre. The road at the entrance was graded to make it practicable for carriages, the Zoo at that time being "a pleasant carriage ride from the city." Editorials proclaiming the undoubted future greatness of the Zoo appeared in leading papers throughout the United States.

During the first year a buffalo cow, annoyed by a visitor, broke through the fence and charged at a nursemaid, who diverted it from the baby she was tending; a brave spirit spat tobacco juice in

a bear's eye and was fined \$5.00; an editorial appeared in a Washington paper decrying "saddling cost of Zoo on District"; one front-page cartoon showed the District of Columbia as a small boy with a patch on the seat of his pants, threatened by the Appropriations Committee in the form of an Italian organ-grinder carrying a monkey labeled the "National Zoological Park." He held a knife, the "Appropriations Snickersnee," ready to drive into the lad, and the legend ran: "Adrone Giuseppe Cannoni to the District—'Gimma da Mon to Feeda da Monk or I cutta da Troat.'"

The Quincy, Ill., *Herald* stated in an editorial that the Zoo "will soon be a credit to the Nation, but should be paid for by the Nation and not by the District." Editorials in other papers discussed the rapacity of the Washingtonians unwilling to pay the costs of a Zoo for their own benefit. After 56 years



AMERICAN BISON

ONE OF THE REASONS FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL PARK.

the subject is still brought up annually. One may state now that on big days at the Zoo there are cars from every state in the Union and one or two cars also from Alaska, Canada, the Canal Zone, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico.

IN THE early days there was no money to buy animals, but some funds were available to collect them. An unsuccessful expedition was made to Alaska to secure the large brown bears. Then, by permission of the Secretaries of State, War, and the Navy, the Zoo sent a circular to officials abroad requesting animals and giving instructions for their care and shipping. The results were surprisingly good. The Governor of Pará sent a large shipment, and Commander Todd of the U. S. S. *Wilmington* brought from Brazil 18 animals, including a tapir and the very rare harpy eagle. Alexander Graham Bell brought mandarin ducks from the Zoo in Tokyo, Japan. Yellowstone Park contributed elk and deer, and the superintendent there thought it would be possible to catch a

grizzly bear. Accordingly, a trap was made at the Zoo and shipped to the park, and a grizzly was caught. Two raccoons were captured in Rock Creek Park, and the President of the United States presented an opossum, probably a wild one from the White House grounds. Eight black squirrels came from the Toronto Park Department and were liberated. There are now dozens of these thriving in the Park.

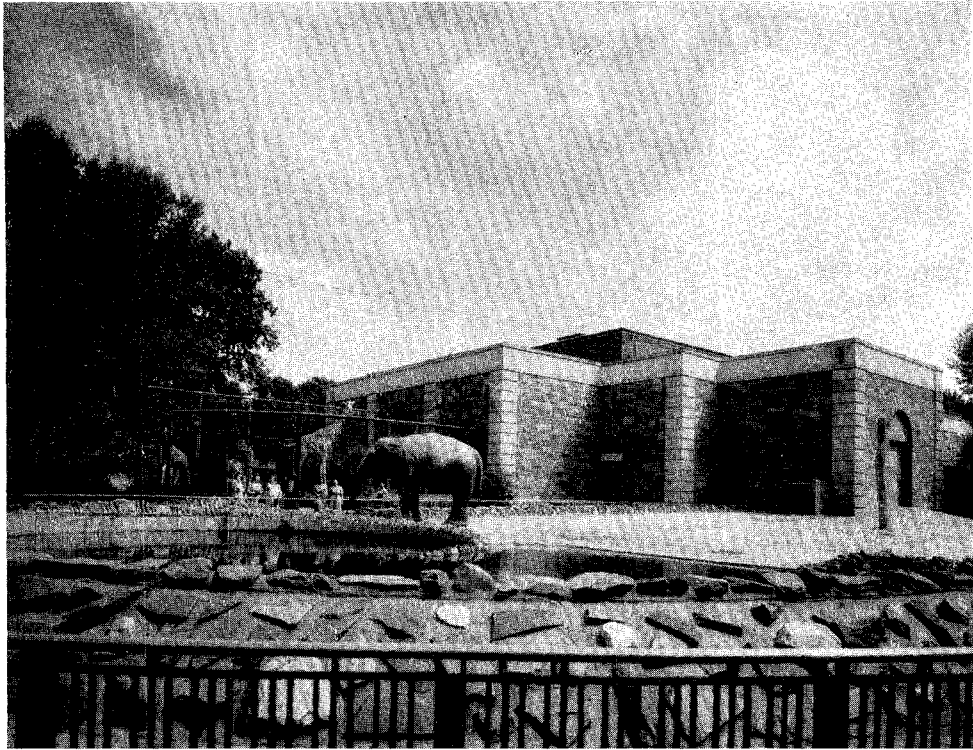
F. W. Goding, of Newcastle, New South Wales, sent an assortment of 140 specimens, including echidna, flying phalangers, a Tasmanian wolf, a Tasmanian devil, and 30 parrots and cockatoos, following this shipment the next year with 15 specimens, including a mate for the Tasmanian wolf.

The U. S. Fish Commission ship, *The Albatross*, brought an even dozen of elephant tortoises from the Galapagos. After the Spanish-American War, the Army sent various lots of specimens, including an amazing shipment of 15 Cuban crocodiles (*C. acutus*). At the present time a single specimen of this



Photo by W. R. Schufelt

THE FIRST ELEPHANT HOUSE



EXTERIOR OF THE NEW LARGE MAMMAL HOUSE

crocodile in captivity is unique outside of Cuba.

James E. Cooper, owner of the Adam Forepaugh Shows, presented a pair of elephants, Dunk and Gold Dust. Gold Dust soon died, but Dunk remained a popular figure in the Zoo for more than a quarter of a century. Many years later, Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus presented Babe, one of their historic elephants.

In 1893 many animals of the Forepaugh Show were deposited for the winter in the Park; some arrived in circus menagerie wagons and were quartered with dromedaries, zebus, and llamas in a temporary stable. The Zoo was to receive half the animals born during the winter, and the net result was one baby kangaroo. However, it is interesting to know that the only hairy-eared Suma-

tran rhinoceros ever exhibited here was lent by the circus and represented this species for the first and last time in Washington, and perhaps in America.

The King of Abyssinia presented President Theodore Roosevelt with some gelada baboons, a lion, and a Somali ostrich; the ostrich lived for 26 years. An exchange was made with the New Zealand government, and a kiwi and a tuatara lizard were put on exhibition. The following year Ras Makonnen, the Governor of Harrar Province in Abyssinia, sent zebras and lions; the Swiss government sent 5 chamois; and W. M. McMillan, of Nairobi, East Africa, offered such a sizable collection that the Assistant Director of the Zoo, Mr. A. B. Baker, journeyed out there and brought back lions, cheetahs, leopards, gazelles, and wart hogs as gifts and a considerable

number of smaller species that he collected himself.

By 1895 the Zoo's collection was so well established that 13 animals were loaned to the Adam Forepaugh Shows, probably in return for their previous gifts of 2 elephants.

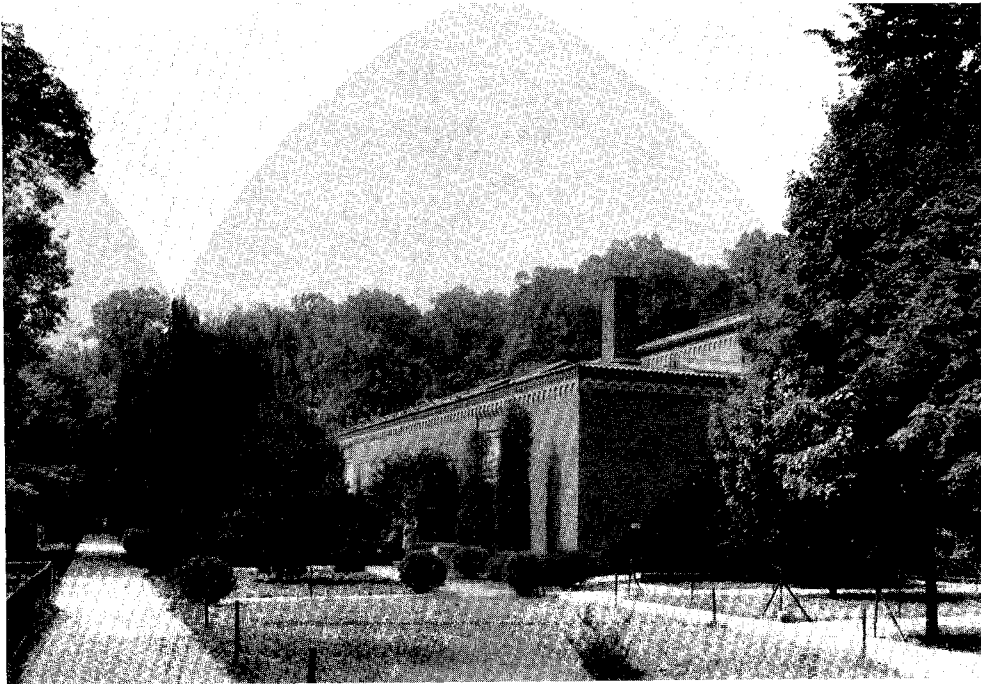
By 1910 there was an average of more than 1,400 visitors a day in the Zoo.

Secretary Langley was fond of coming to the Zoo, where he not only was able to get away from crowds, but also, on a platform built in an oak tree in the Park, to observe the flight of vultures and other birds; afterward he would make his calculations in a quiet room in the Zoo offices. Thus the Zoological Park is closely associated with the early studies of aeronautics in America.

In the early days of the Park the Appropriations Committee of Congress seemed to have a habit of doing things by halves: \$35,000 was asked for main-

tenance, and \$17,500 was appropriated; \$36,000 for improvements was cut to \$18,000; and when \$20,000 was begged in order to build an elephant house, \$10,000 was granted. This did not build a very large elephant house, but it served for 35 years, when it was replaced by a \$287,000 pachyderm house.

In 1913 the government zoological gardens at Giza, Egypt, offered a collection of interesting things, and Mr. Blackburne sailed to get them. He brought back a pair of African elephants, cheetahs, 3 dromedaries, and several other specimens. Jumbo II, as the male elephant was named, died after 3 years, but the other, Jumbina, is still living. Moving her from the quarters she had occupied for nearly a quarter of a century to the new pachyderm house, in 1937, was a formidable task. A strong crate was built, and the elephant, once inside it, was hauled up on a low flat truck to make



EXTERIOR OF THE BIRD HOUSE



EAGLES LIVE IN NATURAL SURROUNDINGS

the move. Since then Jumbina continues to look with disfavor on the Zoo's boss mechanic, whom she evidently associates with certain indignities connected with the ride.

In 1916 the Duke of Bedford sent Kashmir deer and eland, and the Canadian government some Rocky Mountain sheep.

In 1917 Dr. Frank Baker resigned after 26 years of service, and his place was taken by Ned Hollister, of the Biological Survey. At this time Mrs. Charles D. Walcott, wife of the Secretary of the Smithsonian, campaigned among her friends in the city and raised enough money to buy a pair of Sumatran elephants, Hittam and Kechil. Kechil is still living, but Hittam died many years ago. F. W. Goding, who had sent the Australian collection, turned up again,

this time as consul at Guayaquil, and sent some Galapagos tortoises.

Other friends and Zoo fans continued to donate specimens; some of them—for instance, Captain Kellers, of the U. S. Navy, and Victor J. Evans, of Washington, D. C.—were steady contributors year after year, and these contributions, with funds at last available to purchase animals, steadily improved the collection.

Under the auspices of Austin H. Clark, of the National Museum, a series of 31 radio talks was given in 1926, through the cooperation of Station WRC, and each talk included a brief statement of current news at the Park, usually by the Director, who then introduced the speaker of the evening.

Ned Hollister died in 1924, after 8 years as an able superintendent of the park, and was succeeded by Dr. Alex-

ander Wetmore, who served for 5 months, when he was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian. He was followed by the writer, in 1925.

THE following year was a momentous one. Walter P. Chrysler, taking an interest in the Zoo, financed the first expedition that had been possible since those of the very early days of the Park. A group of four collectors went to Tanganyika, East Africa, returning after seven months in the field with over 1,600 specimens, including a pair of giraffes, the first ever in the Zoo, 30 antelopes, leopards, wart hogs, and much smaller stock. This increased the collection from its previous high of 1,600 specimens to 2,400, a standard that has since been maintained.

Mr. Chrysler permitted the Smithsonian to keep funds that had not been expended on the expedition, and with these were purchased N'Gi, our first gorilla, and saddle-billed and shoebill storks—all spectacular. Despite the fact that it was a very cold day, 40,000 visitors were on hand to see N'Gi when he was placed on exhibition.

Following the Chrysler Expedition, the National Geographic Society financed another one to the Netherlands East Indies (and, incidentally, around the world), resulting in a large assortment of rare small things, a quartette of Nubian giraffes, a pair of gaur from India, and quantities of East Indian birds and reptiles, including 18 birds of Paradise, many rare lories, and a young Komodo dragon lizard about 6 feet long.

In 1940 the Firestone Rubber Company, through Harvey Firestone, Jr., invited the Zoo to send an expedition to Liberia, West Africa, to collect animals, using the rubber plantation as headquarters. Pigmy hippos, several species of small duiker antelopes, monkeys, and rare birds and reptiles were obtained for the Zoo by this expedition.

In 1926 the Congressional Committee on Appropriations had decided that the Zoo did need a new bird house. Money was appropriated, and the building constructed as far as the funds permitted. This was followed by appropriations for a reptile house. Through Smithsonian financing, the Director was able to take Mr. Alfred Harris, the Municipal Architect, to Europe, where all of the worthwhile reptile exhibitions were visited and studies made of the buildings. While the house was being constructed, a short expedition was made to Central America to collect reptiles for the exhibition. The building was opened at a reception in February and stocked with the specimens that had been kept here and there about the Zoo.

The reptile house proved so popular that one evening a Congressman, a friendly member of the Zoo Appropriations Committee, came to the Director and said:

We realize that the building program for the Zoo that you have suggested so many times is a good one. But on both of the houses that you have constructed, mistakes were made in estimating their cost. We have decided this year to give you money for plans and specifications for the next building, so that you may make a better estimate of the cost. Then when that is being built, another fund for plans and specifications for the following one.

It sounded good, and the building program seemed practically assured. But there was an election, and the chairman of the committee soon returned to his law practice in Nebraska and the friendly Congressman to his farm in Illinois, leaving the Zoo in the midst of the depression with an entirely new and strange committee. There were no more appropriations for buildings, but through some of the relief agencies considerable work was done: ponds for waterfowl were constructed and other improvements that could be made without expensive materials.

The committee had appropriated the

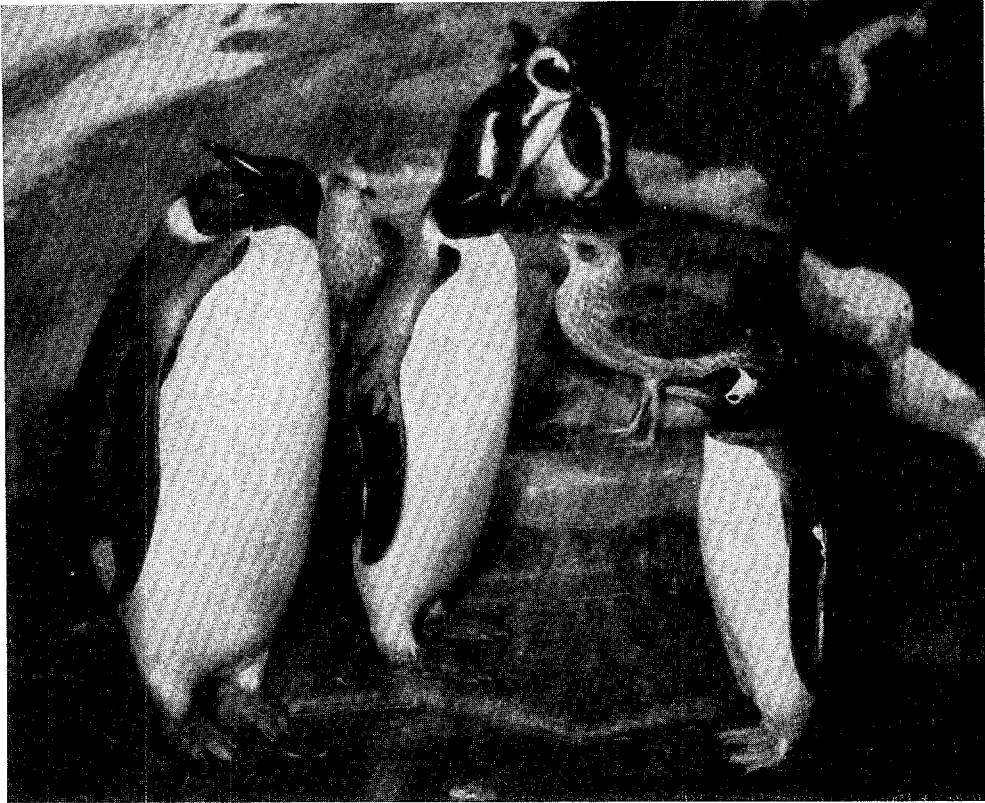


Photo by B. P. Walker

EMPEROR PENGUINS, JACKASS PENGUINS, AND KELP GULLS

ALL THESE BIRDS WERE RECEIVED FROM THE ANTARCTIC AND ARE KEPT IN REFRIGERATED QUARTERS.

sum of \$2,000 a year for collecting trips. One was made to British Guiana and one to the Argentine, each resulting in many interesting additions to the collection. A trip to India resulted in the addition of the rhinoceros collected by the Forestry Department of Assam.

In 1935 the Zoo had a great stroke of good luck: The Public Works Administration allotted \$680,000 and followed this the next year with \$191,000, with which were constructed machine shops, a central heating plant and working facilities, a small mammal house, and a pachyderm house; the bird house was completed, thus giving the Zoo four of the best buildings in the world but leaving three of the most unsatisfactory.

During World War II the Zoo was maintained at almost its normal level; the 48-hour week, put into effect by the government, made up for the decrease in personnel, so the collection was never neglected. Substitutes were necessarily used for numerous ordinary supplies. When flour was scarce, there were utilized great quantities of macaroni products that had been condemned by the United States Marshal and given to the Zoo; a few dried bananas were secured from time to time; Mexican dried insects replaced the ant eggs that had hitherto come from Germany and Japan.

The Army and Navy, especially the Army Medical Corps, sent numerous shipments of specimens, some of them

ex-mascots primarily for exhibition, and others for research; for example, venomous habu snakes were sent from Okinawa so that studies could be made of the venom and the right serum for treatment developed.

IN THE first half-century of its history, the Zoological Park exhibited many creatures that probably will never be seen again in captivity: the West Indian seal, now practically extinct; Tasmanian wolves with young; kiwis from New Zea-

land; and California condors, one of which has lived 45 years in the Park. At the present time the Zoo contains a representative collection of mammals, birds, and reptiles of the world, with small exhibits of fish and insects. Its popularity is attested by the attendance, which numbers well over 2,000,000 each year. Thousands of school children in organized classes, artists, photographers, and students of natural history show that the Park is functioning in the purposes for which it was established.

WILLIAM MANN



WILLIAM MANN, Sc.D., has been Director of the National Zoological Park since 1925. He was born in Helena, Mont., July 1, 1886. It would be interesting to know how many miles he has traveled during the past sixty years. He studied from one

side of the country to the other: Staunton (Va.) Military Academy, State College of Washington, Stanford University (B.A., 1911), and Harvard University. At Harvard he was a graduate student at the Bussey Institution, specializing on ants under William Morton Wheeler. Like Wheeler, Dr. Mann spent as much time as possible studying zoology and entomology in the field. During all vacations he collected natural-history specimens, making trips to Mexico, Cuba, Haiti, western Asia, and South America. Taking his Sc.D., in 1915, he collected in Fiji, Australia, and the Solomon Islands

as a Sheldon Traveling Fellow of Harvard. From 1916 until he became Director of the Zoo he was in the Bureau of Entomology of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Even there he managed to travel, investigating insect pests in the American tropics and in Europe. And in 1922 he accompanied the Mulford Biological Exploration of the Amazon Basin across South America. He must have been unconsciously preparing himself for the position he has held with distinction for the past twenty years. Nearly everyone knows that Dr. Mann is Director of the Zoo, and those who are acquainted with him may have the privilege of seeing the Zoo "under the best auspices"; that is, by touring the Zoo with Dr. Mann himself. Always full of enthusiasm, he is the most entertaining guide to be found in Washington. Now and then he has left the Zoo to direct expeditions for the purpose of collecting and bringing back live animals. He headed the Smithsonian-Chrysler Expedition to East Africa, the National Geographic Expedition to the East Indies, and the Smithsonian-Firestone Expedition to Liberia. And he has made shorter trips to Central and South America.