THE EXHIBIT OF FOSSIL SLOTHS

By Elmer S. Riggs
Associate Curator of Paleontology

In Ernest R. Graham Hall (Hall 38) a collection of skulls of fossil sloths, representing almost every branch of the family, was recently installed. Some are only a few thousand years old; others are from animals that lived thirty million years ago. Most of these specimens were collected by two Marshall Field Paleontological Expeditions to South America.

The sloths are one of the oldest families of South American mammals. Some lived in trees, as do modern sloths which still survive in the Amazon forests. The greater number, however, lived upon the ground, and all of the ground sloths are extinct.

The earliest sloth represented in this collection was about as large as the common badger. It lived during the Oligocene period in swamp lands in the region which is now southern Argentina. Six of the smaller specimens are skulls of sloths that lived in the next later period, the Miocene. They were found along the Atlantic coast of Argentina where the sea is steadily cutting away the plains and exposing fossils more abundantly. Some of these were apparently tree-sloths; others were larger and had probably acquired the habits of ground-sloths.

Specimens from the next later geological period, the Pliocene, were found in northern Argentina where hardened ledges of sandstone, in steep cliffs, crop out along the valleys of streams. Among fossil animals of many kinds are found here the remains of larger and more recent sloths. Three specimens in the exhibited series belong to this period, seven million years ago. The two continents of America had by this time joined at the isthmus, and sloths and other land animals had found a way to move northward by that route to new territory.

Seven of the larger specimens in this collection are skulls of sloths which lived during the last geological period extending back one million years. These animals varied in size from that of a hippopotamus to that of an elephant. Four of the specimens are from a valley in southern Bolivia where they had been covered by sediments washed down from the mountains. Three others are from the famous pampa formation of central Argentina consisting of low, flat lands, often overflowed by rivers. As these streams later cut their channels deeper and wider through the accumulated sands and clays, the fossils were laid bare.

A single specimen in this series represents one of the various species of sloths which migrated northward and found a home in California. This one is from the famous "asphaltum pools" of Rancho la Brea near Los Angeles. There the animal had wandered into a trap set by nature, floundered and sunk into the tar-filled pool, and had been preserved as a fossil by the tarry mass.

The sloths were all plant-eaters. They reared upon their stout hind legs, pulled down branches of bushes and trees, and fed upon the leaves and fruit. A group near the serial collection shows an articulated ground-sloth skeleton in position for feeding in this way. A second skeleton in the group is postured to use the great, hooked claws of the fore foot to dig in the ground for roots and tubers.

The life and religious practices of the Potawatomi Indians, who formerly inhabited the Chicago region, are illustrated by exhibits in the Department of Anthropology.

No Parking During Exposition

Under regulations made by the South Park Commissioners to avoid congestion of traffic, there will be no parking of automobiles permitted in the vicinity of Field Museum or other institutions in Grant Park during the period of A Century of Progress exposition.

THE WOLF HERRING

By Alfred C. Weed
Assistant Curator of Fishes

Nearly all members of the great group of herring-like fishes are small, delicate creatures, whose mission in life seems to be to provide other inhabitants of the sea, and mankind, with food. Man, mammals, birds and fish all take heavy toll of the immense schools of herring, sprats, anchovies and whitebait. Fishermen spend fortunes in preparing gear to catch fish so small that it takes dozens of them to fill an ordinary teacup. However, there are larger forms, and the range in size between a whitebait an inch or so in length and a tarpon that weighs three hundred pounds is very impressive. Many of these larger species spend much of their time seeking their own smaller relatives, to devour them.

In the warm waters of the Red Sea, Indian Ocean and eastward through most of the tropical islands of the Pacific we find a large herring-like fish called "dorab" by the Arabs. Native fishermen give it various names in their own languages. English-speaking people usually call it by the native name most familiar to them. A few writers from Australia have called it "wolf herring," a name well suited to the fish.

This fish is much like a herring in general appearance, except that it is much longer for its width and height. The head is like that of a herring, but tips upward until the lower jaw is almost vertical. The mouth is filled with sharp, strong fangs so long that the mouth can hardly be closed far enough to hide them. The mouth is so nearly vertical that the chin is part of the top of the head.

The wolf herring, like our bluefish, is a strong, swift swimmer, living in the open sea, mostly not far from shore. Its food is found in the schools of small herring-like fishes, which it follows as the bluefish follows the schools of sardines and menhaden.

Although this fish has been well known to scientists for years, little has been published about its habits. Many writers have had something to say about its value as food. Some consider it good while others say that only the lowest classes of people eat it at all. In most places it seems to be taken only accidentally in fishing for other species. One author reported that there was, in his time, a fishery for it in the Red Sea.

Not much is known about the size to which this fish grows. The older writers thought it reached a length of twelve feet and that size has been quoted by some recent authors. As we come to more recent writings we find one man who says, "Individuals of six feet in length are at Pinang of rare occurrence." Still more recently writers say that they have seldom seen one more than three feet long. Even one that size on light tackle should be as sporting a fish as our bluefish.

A celluloid reproduction of a wolf herring has been prepared by Staff Taxidermist A. G. Rueckert from specimens collected by various expeditions to the Pacific and is now on exhibition in Albert W. Harris Hall (Hall 18).

JUNE GUIDE-LECTURE TOURS

Conducted tours of exhibits, under the guidance of staff lecturers, are made every afternoon at 3 P.M., except Saturdays, Sundays, and certain holidays. Following is the schedule of subjects and dates for June:

Thursday, June 1—General Tour; Friday—Pewter, Jade and Gems.

Week beginning June 5: Monday—Peat, Coal and Iron; Tuesday—General Tour; Wednesday—Egyptian Hall; Thursday—General Tour; Friday—Plant Life.

Week beginning June 12: Monday—Birds of Many Lands; Tuesday—General Tour; Wednesday—Chinese Exhibits; Thursday—General Tour; Friday—Prehistoric Life.

Week beginning June 19: Monday—Indians and Eskimos; Tuesday—General Tour; Wednesday—Trees and Wood Products; Thursday—General Tour; Friday—American Archaeology.

Week beginning June 26: Monday—Moon, Meteorites and Minerals; Tuesday—General Tour; Wednesday—Animal Groups; Thursday—General Tour; Friday—Reptiles, Past and Present.

Persons wishing to participate should apply at North Entrance. Tours are free and no gratuities are to be proffered. A new schedule will appear each month in Field Museum News. Guide-lecturers' services for special tours by parties of ten or more are available free of charge by arrangement with the Director a week in advance.

Gifts to the Museum

Following is a list of some of the principal gifts received during the last month:

From Mrs. William H. Moore—15 metal mirrors and other archaeological material, China; from Miss Lucy D. Plummer—13 specimens of glazed and painted pottery of Chama Indians, Peru; from Companhia Ford Industrial do Brasil—25 herbarium specimens with accompanying wood specimens, Brazil; from Emilio Kauffmann—trunk of a rubber tree, lower Brazilian Amazon; from William A. Schipp—204 herbarium specimens, British Honduras; from Dr. B. E. Dahlgren—210 herbarium specimens, Brazil; from Universitetets Botaniske Museum, Norway—474 duplicate and fragmentary herbarium specimens, Ecuador; from School of Forestry, Yale University—71 herbarium specimens, Colombia; from Herbert C. Walther—4 specimens of rare elements, Kansas and California; from Ernest E. Halvorsen—a specimen of calcareous tufa and a Yokuts stone mortar, California; from L. H. Phillips—402 insects, Philippine Islands; from Jonathan Williams—2 specimens of Graham's water snake, Illinois; from J. A. Sanchez Antunano—2 bobwhite skins; from Dr. Charles E. Burt—53 specimens of frogs, snakes, and lizards; from Mrs. Henry Birkholz—a long-tailed shrew, Indiana.

NEW MEMBERS

The following persons were elected to membership in Field Museum during the period from April 18 to May 15:

Associate Members

Mrs. J. Russell Forgan, Mrs. William A. Nitze, John W. O'Leary, Mrs. R. J. Raney.

Annual Members

Mrs. William Grant Agar, William L. Ayers, John A. Carter, Jr., Samuel A. Ettelson, Joseph R. Gibson, J. M. Hall, Mrs. Frank K. Hoover, J. S. Jordan, Joseph P. Langford, Thomas B. Lantry, Mrs. Roswell C. Mower, Miss Sara A. Randick, Mrs. Helen Schymanski, J. G. Smithwick, William L. Stensgaard, Mrs. Martin Strand, Miss Victoria Warnesson, Morton Weinress, Mrs. H. Gideon Wells.

New Britain Canoe Ornaments

Interesting examples of the care and skill exercised in their work by the South Sea designers and artisans are the prow and stern ornaments of a ceremonial canoe from New Britain on exhibition in Joseph N. Field Hall (Hall A). The two together nearly fill one side of a case. Each is carved from a single piece of wood. The great number of slender rods and points, running in all directions from the grain, show the extreme care necessary.

Sands of the Arabian desert are included in the soil collection in Hall 36.

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