

be of interest in connection with the origin of measurements by the foot, the span, the hairs-breadth, etc.

H. H. CLAYTON.

BLUE HILL, MASS., September 5, 1899.

#### THE FAUNA OF PORTO RICO.

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: It is somewhat surprising to find in the current number of SCIENCE (Sept. 1, p. 286), a paper by Dr. Mark W. Harrington on the 'Fauna and Flora of Puerto Rico,' which shows the writer to have, in some respects, less knowledge of West Indian mammal and bird life than was possessed by the discoverer of these islands. Columbus, in his journals, comments on the absence of large animals in the islands which he visited and states that the only land mammal found was the *Hutia*, or *Utia*, on which he was feasted by the natives of the Bahamas, Hayti and San Domingo, and Cuba. In the last named island the animal is still common under this name,\* three species being known, viz., *Capromys pilorides*, *C. melanurus*, and *C. prehensilis*. The remaining members of the genus are *Capromys brachyurus*, of Jamaica, now supposed to be on the verge of extinction, largely through the ravages of the Mongoose; *C. thoracatus*, a nearly allied form discovered by Townsend in Swan Island, and the remarkably distinct *C. ingrahami*, described by Allen from the Plana Keys, Bahamas, in 1891, when for first time Columbus' mention of the *Utia* in the Bahamas was given a scientific status. In Hayti and San Domingo there occurs a member of the same Histricomorphine family (Octodontidæ), *Plagiodonti ædium*, an exceedingly rare animal of which little is known, and this, with the six species of *Capromys* named, two species of *Solendon*—one each from Cuba and Hayti—and a small species of *Oryzomys* from Jamaica, constitutes the entire known indigenous terrestrial mammalian fauna of the Greater Antil-

\*In Hill's recently published 'Cuba and Porto Rico' (p. 55), this animal is miscalled 'Agouti.' Only one species is said to occur in Cuba, and the creature is stated to be found in the Windward Islands, but not in Jamaica, whereas the reverse is true. There is, however, in the Windward Islands a true Agouti (*Dasyprocta cristata*), the only member of the genus occurring in the West Indies.

les; there being, therefore, no indigenous land mammal recorded from Porto Rico. For this reason it is with no small interest we find your correspondent saying of the 'wild fauna' of Porto Rico: "Generally speaking, the largest wild mammal is a ground squirrel, about the size of a gopher. A few others of larger size are reported from time to time, but they are only occasional and are probably animals escaped from cultivation. Probably the larger animals once existed, and their traces could doubtless be found by a linguist in the place names which abound all over the island and are quite often not Spanish \* \* \*."

The 'squirrel' mentioned is as yet unknown to students of the Greater Antillean fauna, who have also failed to discover, either in the records of man or nature, any evidence of the former existence of large mammals in these islands.

In respect to birds, it appears that both your correspondent and Columbus found 'Nightingales' in the West Indies; an error as pardonable 400 years ago as it is inexcusable to-day.

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AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY,  
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#### METHODS FOR A CARD INDEX.

IN the last number of SCIENCE Professor Porter, of the Harvard Medical School, outlines a plan for a card *Centralblatt* of physiology, which when carried into effect will greatly smooth the way for students of physiology and related sciences. I am not, however, sure that the plan proposed is the most practicable. A card index is without doubt the most convenient form of an index, chiefly because it can be continually and homogeneously increased. It is, however, bulky and somewhat inconvenient to use, and hence, I think, not suited for the publication of abstracts, especially when they extend beyond the limits of a single card. The most convenient and economical method of storing printed matter is in the form of books on a shelf. The card catalogue should be an index to these books.

There should be for each of the sciences *Centralblätter* or series of abstracts and probably one in each leading country so as to secure