

SCIENCE

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FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 1900.

ELLIOTT COUES.

CONTENTS:

<i>Elliott Coues</i> : DR. J. A. ALLEN.....	161
<i>The New Department of Vertebrate Paleontology of the Carnegie Museum</i> : DR. J. L. WORTMANN..	163
<i>An International Plan for the Future Study for the Variation of Latitude</i> : DR. GEO. A. HILL.....	166
<i>The American Morphological Society</i> : PROFESSOR J. S. KINGSLEY.....	167
<i>Scientific Books</i> :—	
<i>Leitfaden der Kartenentwurfslehre</i> : DR. A. LINDENKOHL. <i>Ribot's, The Evolution of General Ideas</i> : JOSEPH JASTROW. <i>Books Received</i>	181
<i>Scientific Journals and Articles</i>	187
<i>Societies and Academies</i> :—	
<i>Geological Society of America</i> : F. L. RANSOME, DAVID WHITE. <i>Biological Society of Washington</i> : T. W. STANTON. <i>Chemical Society of Washington</i> : WM. A. KRUG. <i>The New York Section of the American Chemical Society</i> : DURAND WOODMAN. <i>Zoological Club of the University of Chicago</i> : DR. C. M. CHILD. <i>Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club</i>	187
<i>Discussion and Correspondence</i> :—	
<i>Buckley on the Building and Ornamental Stones of Wisconsin</i> : C. R. VAN HISE. <i>Hydrostatic vs. Lithoplastic Theory of Gas Well Pressure</i> : PROFESSOR ARTHUR M. MILLER. <i>Hearing in Ants</i> : PROFESSOR MAYNARD M. METCALF....	191
<i>Notes on Inorganic Chemistry</i> : J. L. H.....	194
<i>Cambridge University</i>	195
<i>Graduate Study and the Smithsonian Institution</i>	195
<i>The Missouri Botanical Garden</i>	196
<i>Scientific Notes and News</i>	197
<i>University and Educational News</i>	200

ELLIOTT COUES, the eminent ornithologist, died at Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, Md., December, 25, 1899, at the comparatively early age of 57 years. Dr. Coues was born in Portsmouth, N. H., September 9, 1842. In 1853 his father, Samuel Elliott Coues, removed with his family to Washington, D. C., where Dr. Coues was educated. He was fitted for college at the Jesuit Seminary, now known as Gonzaga College, and in 1857 entered what is now the Columbian University, taking his degree of A. B. in 1861, and his medical degree in 1863, and receiving later from the same institution the honorary degrees of M. A., and Ph.D. While yet a medical student he was enlisted as a medical cadet, and soon after graduation was appointed assistant surgeon in the United States Army, his first station being Fort Whipple, Arizona. Later he was assigned to Fort Macon, North Carolina, and afterwards to Fort McHenry, Baltimore. In 1873 he was ordered to Fort Randall, Dakota, and thence assigned as surgeon and naturalist to the United States Northern Boundary Commission, which surveyed the line of the forty-ninth parallel from the Lake of the Woods westward to the Rocky Mountains. The following six years were spent in Washington, the first two in the preparation of the scientific report of the Northern Boundary Survey, on the conclusion of which he was

detailed as secretary and naturalist of the United States Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories, under the late Dr. F. V. Hayden. In 1880 he was again ordered to Arizona, but the duties of a post-surgeon on the frontier were so incompatible with the prosecution of the scientific work he had then in hand that, failing to receive a more favorable assignment, he resigned his army commission in order to devote his whole attention to scientific pursuits. From 1881 till his death he resided in Washington, making, however, in recent years, several long journeys to the West and Southwest to aid his editorial researches in connection with the early exploration of our trans-Mississippi territory. For ten years, beginning with 1877, he filled the chair of Anatomy at the National Medical College in Washington.

Dr. Coues doubtless inherited from his father, who wrote several notable speculative works on physical science, his strong love for scientific research. His residence in Washington during his early years brought him into close contact with the late Professor Baird, of whom he was a pupil and ardent admirer, and who directed Coues's early ornithological efforts. His very first papers, published while he was still a youth of eighteen, took the form of technical monographs, and would have been creditable to a far more experienced hand. His 'Monograph of the *Tringæ* of North America' and his 'Monograph of the Genus *Ægiothus*, with Descriptions of New Species,' both appeared in 1861, and in thoroughness of research and in method of presentation foreshadow the author's subsequent eminence in the ornithological field. These were quickly followed by his 'Synopsis of the North American Forms of *Colymbidæ* and *Podicipidæ*' (1862); 'Revision of the Gulls and Terns of North America' (1862); 'Critical Review of the *Procellariidæ*' (1864-1866), and his 'Mon-

ograph of the *Alcidæ*' (1868). In the summer of 1860 he made a trip to Labrador, which served as the basis of his notes on the 'Ornithology of Labrador' (1861), and later his residence at various army posts, both in the East and in the West, gave him a wide field experience, which he did not fail to utilize to the utmost.

During the twenty years from 1861 to 1881 he published 300 works and papers, mostly ornithological, and probably as many more between this latter date and the time of his death. Although his ornithological writings relate mainly to North American birds, they also include the science in its broadest sense. He also published a number of special monographs on various families of North American mammals. His contributions to the 'Century Dictionary,' representing about seven years of his best work, include some 40,000 entries which he either edited or contributed, he having editorial charge of the subjects, General Zoology, Biology, and Comparative Anatomy. Another important literary undertaking that absorbed the energies of his later years, also outside of ornithology, was the editing of the original Lewis and Clark 'Journals,' Pike's 'Account' of his journey to the Rocky Mountains, Fowler's 'Journal,' and Larpenteur's 'Personal Narrative.' These works are of the highest interest, relating as they do to the early exploration of western North America, and have been edited and annotated by Coues from the original documents, with a thoroughness and minuteness of detail that adds greatly to their value and interest.

Among Dr. Coues's more important special works may be mentioned the following: 'Key to North American Birds,' 1872, entirely rewritten and republished in 1884; 'Field Ornithology,' 1874; 'Birds of the Northwest,' 1874; 'Fur-bearing Animals,' 1877; 'Monographs of North American

Rodentia' (with J. A. Allen), 1877; 'Birds of the Colorado Valley,' 1878; 'Bibliography of Ornithology,' various installments, 1878-1880; 'New England Bird Life' (with W. A. Stearns), 1882; 'Dictionary and Check-List of North American Birds,' 1882. For four years he edited the publications of the Hayden Survey. Unfortunately only a small portion of his invaluable 'Bibliography of Ornithology' was ever published, but the published part has been of the greatest service to all workers on American birds, to which these portions mainly relate.

No work doubtless has had such a beneficent influence upon the progress of American ornithology as Coues's 'Key,' originally published in 1872, and republished in 1884 as a practically new work. During the last two years it has again been rewritten, and again transformed and brought down to date; we understand the manuscripts were left in such condition that the work will soon go to press, and will doubtless prove a lasting monument to the industry and skill of its gifted author.

Dr. Coues was not lacking in scientific honors. In 1877 he was elected a member of the National Academy of Sciences; he was also a member of all the more prominent American scientific societies, and of many foreign academies and societies. He was one of the founders of the American Ornithologists' Union, at one time its president, and always a member of its council and more important committees. He took a most earnest interest in its welfare and fame, and always viewed with satisfaction and pride his share in its organization and achievements, and his death will be held as a personal loss to his fellow members.

As I have said elsewhere (*Auk*, January, 1900, p. 91), Dr. Coues, as an all-around ornithologist, occupied a position of first-rank among the cultivators of this science. His influence upon the progress of technical

ornithology in America is only second to that of Baird; as a popular writer on birds he was without a peer. His rare literary gifts rendered him a fluent and impressive speaker, and a writer of exceptional readability and originality of expression. His activity was prodigious and his capacity for work phenomenal. Though impulsive and at times somewhat erratic, he had many admirable traits, which none can so well appreciate as those who knew him most intimately.

J. A. ALLEN.

THE NEW DEPARTMENT OF VERTEBRATE
PALEONTOLOGY OF THE CARNEGIE
MUSEUM.

THE organization of this department in the Carnegie Museum during the past year has marked an important advance in the history of this young and growing institution. The unequaled facilities which the western portions of our country afford for the pursuit of this important branch of science have now come to be fully appreciated, and have within the past few years resulted in giving to this study an impetus which a few years ago was totally unknown.

The remarkable consecutiveness of this life record, together with its richness in vertebrate remains, especially in the Mesozoic and the Tertiary rocks, has permitted the gathering of collections of inestimable value when we consider what they contribute to the solution of some of the great problems in biology.

It has always seemed to me that our leading institutions have been unusually slow to recognize the value and importance of these collections, more especially when it is remembered that the greatest development of the science has taken place in this country and has formed such a conspicuous feature of American achievement in scientific investigation. The addition of a new member to the comparatively limited circle,