

## FELIS OREGONENSIS RAF. AGAIN!

IN his recent 'Revision of the Pumas' (*Proc. Wash. Acad. Sci.*, pp. 577-600), Dr. C. Hart Merriam devotes over a page to the inapplicability of the above name and to censuring my action in bringing it forward to replace *F. hipolestes olympus* given by himself in 1897. He states that it is a 'fallacious interpretation of our principles of nomenclature' to replace a name well characterized and accompanied by definite type and locality, by an older one deficient in these respects. This statement will, I think, be questioned by many zoologists who have erred in this way more than I.

Personally, I would be only too glad to throw out of consideration all the names proposed by Rafinesque and others of his time, as it would save us a deal of trouble, but if we recognize the principles of priority I see no excuse for such action, and such questions as the present one resolve themselves entirely into a consideration of the applicability of the older name.

This is largely a matter of individual opinion and in the absence of any tribunal for the consideration of a uniform nomenclature for our mammals individual preference will prevail. However a few words regarding Dr. Merriam's stand may not be out of place.

In Rafinesque's first paper he undoubtedly has in mind the *Felis concolor* group, that will be admitted on all hands.

In his second paper he names a variety of the puma (as mentioned in the first paper) from northwestern United States (Oregon by implication). The absence of a definite type locality in no way invalidates the name if otherwise satisfactorily diagnosed. We have many names now in use with just as vague type localities.

The description is very brief, but as good as many other early diagnoses and to my mind clearly indicates the same animal later characterized by Dr. Merriam. Moreover, I do not think it is 'grossly incorrect.'

Rafinesque says 'Dark brown, nearly black on the back, belly white.'

Dr. Merriam says 'Dark rufous brown, darkest along middle of back, backs of ears black,

tip of tail blackish, breast and inguinal region soiled whitish, anterior part of throat white.'

Rafinesque had no 'manual of colors' and was of course not as exact as our present-day systematists, but it seems to me that his description is sufficiently accurate.

As to Dr. Merriam's argument that he probably never saw a specimen of the animal, we have positively no evidence one way or the other, and the fact does not affect the validity of the name nor do Dr. Merriam's further remarks about the other unrecognized cats that Rafinesque speaks of. The descriptions of *Cervus macrourus* and *C. hemionus* of the same author which are recognized and adopted by Dr. Merriam are associated with a lot of unidentifiable descriptions, and are admittedly based upon descriptions of travelers, while the diagnoses are no better than that of *Felis oregonensis*. If one stands, so should the others, in my estimation.

I might add that, so far as I am aware, every one who has written on this puma since my note appeared in SCIENCE has followed my views, even Dr. Merriam himself, who adopted the name *oregonensis* without comment, in his 'Biological Survey of Mt. Shasta' (p. 104).

As to the statement that no name based on hearsay accounts of travelers would be accepted if published to-day, we might suggest some recent cases that come pretty near to this, such as *Equus johnsoni*, which was based upon hearsay accounts of native Africans and two strips of skin, and *Macrias amissus* (SCIENCE, December 13), on a photograph and regretful recollections of a fish that was lost overboard after having been captured!

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## A VERY SENSITIVE THERMOSTAT.

For many forms of scientific investigation constancy of temperature is required. Such constancy may be secured, within a few hundredths of a degree, by several types of thermostat. For certain inquiries undertaken by the writer relative to the so-called 'critical' phenomena of liquids and gases, a much greater degree of accuracy was necessary.