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A TAXONOMIST'S EXPERIENCE WITH HYBRIDS IN THE WILD[1]

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IT is with much trepidation that I approach this subject in an audience that is doubtless more deeply informed on the recent phases of genetics than I. The only justification for such audacity is that possibly some of the observations from another angle may supplement the splendid work of modern students in that now highly specialized field. I shall not attempt, however, a very deep genetical discussion of the observations made.

In his every-day experience with plants in the field the taxonomist is accustomed to think of the species in certain groups as clear cut and easy to work with, while other groups are difficult and the species more or less confused with no sharp boundaries. Much thought has been given at different times to the question as to why there is this difference between groups and what is its true phylogenetic significance. Long ago, among the special creationists there seemed to be no explanation other than that at the moment of creation the plans for these difficult groups had not been sufficiently worked out and perfected. Following the general acceptance of the theory of evolution, it seemed that in certain groups, species were perhaps in the making, through active variation, with the lines not clearly drawn as yet by natural selection. The more confused groups were therefore the newer groups. There still seems much reason for thinking this to be true in a general way.

That hybridity played any important part in causing the difficulty of species delineation in these groups was given little attention and rarely if ever suggested. The occurrence of hybrids in the wild was, in those days, thought to be a rather rare occurrence. In

[1] Address of the retiring vice-president and chairman of the Section for the Botanical Sciences, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Pittsburgh, December, 1934.