

SCIENTIFIC EVENTS

THE ROYAL OBSERVATORY AT THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE

THE 1941 report of H.M. Astronomer at the Cape of Good Hope shows, according to *Nature*, only too clearly the impact of the war on South African astronomy. The reversible transit circle has been fairly fully employed in making 7,234 transit observations, including fifty-seven of the moon, which were undertaken in view of the fact that lunar observations have perforce been dropped from the restricted programs of many European observatories. With the Victoria telescope the stellar parallax program has been continued, 2,642 plates having been secured during the year. A new determination of the parallax of Proxima Centauri, the star closest to the sun, gives $0.763'' \pm 0.007''$, in good agreement with the previously accepted figure of $0.762'' \pm 0.005''$; this should be compared with the value $0.756'' \pm 0.007''$ for α Centauri. During recent years the number of plates used for a parallax determination has increased to thirty, taken over three years or more. This change is fully in accord with the experience gained in the cloudier weather (but better seeing) at Greenwich.

The photoheliograph record of the sun's disc has suffered somewhat from the shortage of fine-grain plates, but a record, either on lantern plates or faster emulsions, was obtained on 311 days. Observations of occultations by the moon indicate a correction of $0.77''$ to its ephemeris longitude, which is of course based on Brown's Tables. This correction is expected to reach zero in 1943. Cometary observations included the photographing of Comet 1941c (de Kock), which reached the second magnitude, and of Comet Cunningham, which did not live up to expectations and only just reached naked-eye brightness. The weather at the Cape over the year was cloudier than usual, rainfall being 40 per cent. above normal, as the result of considerable falls on a large number of days rather than excessive falls on a few days. Substantial observing losses through cloud were recorded in the programs of the Victoria telescope and of the photoheliograph, but in spite of the weather the increased efforts of a war-depleted staff actually raised the number of observations made with the transit circle.

NEW HABITAT GROUPS OF THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

FOUR new habitat groups at the American Museum of Natural History have been opened to the public in the Whitney Memorial Hall of Birds. These groups

show the bird life, flora and terrain of the Solomon Islands, Fiji, New Caledonia and the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. The exhibits were dedicated on the previous day at informal ceremonies attended by a number of invited guests and representatives of the Whitney family.

Since the opening of the Whitney Memorial Hall in June, 1939, with the completion of the first nine groups representing land and sea birds, principally of eastern and Mid-Pacific islands, the museum has sponsored further expeditions to other parts of the Pacific in order to round out its collections of accessories for the remaining nine exhibits.

A large part of this material was collected in 1940 by the late Lieutenant Adam Bruce Fahnestock and his brother, Captain John Sheridan Fahnestock, on the Fahnestock-American Museum of Natural History Expedition to island areas of the far southern Pacific. All field studies, botanical specimens and other accessories from sites represented in the four new groups were collected and shipped to the United States before the *Director II* was wrecked and sunk off the Great Barrier Reef, Australia.

Construction of the new groups was made possible by the gifts of Major Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney for the hall, which is a memorial to his father, Harry Payne Whitney, and his grandfather, William C. Whitney. The groups were planned and assembled by Dr. James L. Clark, head of the department of arts and preparation, under the scientific direction of Dr. Robert Cushman Murphy, chairman of the department of birds. The accessories and foregrounds of the exhibits were prepared by George E. Petersen, who also accompanied the Fahnestock expedition as technical field assistant. Raymond B. Potter, assisted by George Adams, mounted the birds for the groups.

These new groups, like the previously completed exhibits, carry out the general design of Whitney Memorial Hall, planned to give visitors the illusion that from the middle of the Pacific Ocean they are viewing scenes of birdlife in every direction for thousands of miles. From mountainsides, white sandy beaches, islands of black volcanic rock or guano cliffs, a common horizon of clouds and sky rises to the blue vault of the flying bird dome that forms the ceiling of the hall. Francis Leo Jaques, artist and well-known painter of birds, also painted the backgrounds for the latest exhibits.

The collection of material for the five remaining groups planned for completion of the hall has been postponed for the duration of the war.