Society of Protozoologists

SINCE their discovery by Leeuwenhoek, some 20,000 species of protozoans have been described. They occur in practically all habitats where life can exist and are among the first links of the food chain on which all higher life depends. Floating in the plankton of tropic seas, they cause the luminous glow of waves and ship-wakes. Blooming off our coasts, they cause the red tide which deposits windrows of dead fish on shore. They abound in ponds and streams and in the soil. Their role in sewage purification is just beginning to be understood. Their skeletons cover the ocean floor and form the chalk we use in teaching.

As parasites, protozoans play a double role. Malaria is still the world's most important disease. Trypanosomiasis has interdicted vast African grazing lands for livestock. Amebas cause dysentery in man, and coccidians cause it in his domestic animals. But other protozoans, packing the termite's hind-gut almost solidly, digest the cellulose that it eats and feed it with their wastes and their dead bodies. Fabulous numbers of protozoans swarm in the paunch of cattle and sheep and in the cecum and colon of the horse, but their role there is still unknown.

Some protozoans appear deceptively simple, others fantastically complex. Yet even the morphologically simple ones are physiologically complex. The human parasite, *Entamoeba histolytica,* looks like little more than a blob of protoplasm with a nucleus, but it has still not been cultivated free of other living organisms.

Because of their unique characteristics, protozoans are remarkably rewarding research subjects. They are studied for their own sake by taxonomists, physiologists, and others, and partly for the sake of their hosts by parasitologists. More and more in recent years students of higher animals and plants have turned to them when confronted by problems difficult to handle in multicellular organisms. Because of their small size and rapid rate of reproduction, many individuals can be obtained at low cost. This makes protozoans excellent subjects for genetic, ecologic, and other studies. And they offer a challenge to students of metabolic pathways who are weary of bacteria and are looking for new fields to conquer. They are ideal subjects for the study of comparative nutrition, since almost every kind of nutrition is represented in the phylum.

The backgrounds and interests of the persons who work with protozoans are so different that they are often unfamiliar with what their confreres are doing. More important, they are often unaware of the value of their confreres' work for their own investigations. Parasitologists, for example, can pick up ideas applicable to their own work from studies reported on free-living protozoans.

In recognition of this, the Society of Protozoologists was organized in 1947. Its objectives are closer association of workers in protozoology and the advancement of protozoology. It now has about 450 members and has held six meetings in association with either the American Association for the Advancement of Science or the American Institute of Biological Sciences. The society also began publication of a quarterly journal, the *Journal of Protozoology,* in 1954.

The society is compiling a list of the protozoans maintained by research workers throughout the world and is assembling information on methods of cultivation, optimal growth conditions, isolation procedures, and so forth, for each species and strain. Information on about 750 strains has already been gathered and is in process of compilation. Undoubtedly many persons are carrying protozoan cultures that are not in this compilation. They are invited to write to the secretary for blank data cards so that their cultures can be included.

As a final footnote, the Society of Protozoologists is one of the few that recognize the graduate students' financial status. Their dues are two-thirds those of other members, but their rights and privileges are the same.

NORMAN D. LEVINE, *Secretary,*
Society of Protozoologists
College of Veterinary Medicine
and *Agricultural Experiment Station,*
University of Illinois, Urbana

SCIENCE, founded in 1880, is published each Friday by the American Association for the Advancement of Science at Business Press, Lancaster, Pa.
SCIENCE is indexed in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature.*
All correspondence should be addressed to SCIENCE, 1515 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington 5, D. C. Manuscripts should be typed with double spacing and submitted in duplicate. The AAAS assumes no responsibility for the safety of manuscripts or for the opinions expressed by contributors.

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