

E. R. Dunn, Herpetologist

Emmett Reid Dunn had an extraordinary grasp of herpetology on a world-wide basis. His phenomenal memory and his knowledge of animals, their classification, their distribution, and the literature written about them were such that he was the oracle to whom colleagues and students turned repeatedly for information and guidance. As a college professor, an excellent field and museum man, and as an eminent authority, he was in a position to make large and important contributions to zoology. This he did in more than 200 published works.

Dr. Dunn, who was known as "Dixie" to his close friends, was born in Alexandria, Virginia, 21 November 1894. His first introduction to herpetology came, naturally enough, when his boyhood activities placed him in possession of sundry frogs, snakes, and turtles. But unlike most lads, who keep such pets as a passing fancy, young Emmett took them seriously and was soon visiting the National Zoo and Museum in search of knowledge about them. His schooling took him to Haverford College and later to Harvard where he received his Ph.D. in 1921. While teaching at Smith College he met and married a fellow teacher, Alta Merle Taylor, who became his constant companion in the field and assisted in the preparation of many of his papers. A few years after joining the faculty of Haverford College in 1929 he became David Scull professor of zoology, a chair that he occupied until the time of his death, 13 February 1956. He had been ill for a year.

Geographically, Dr. Dunn's special interests at first embraced the United States, but they soon encompassed a large segment of the Neotropical region. Early expeditions took him into the mountains of his native Virginia and into the fastnesses of the southern Blue Ridge Mountains. There he became acquainted with the extraordinarily rich salamander fauna of the region, and his early collecting activities and his lively curiosity

about the group culminated eventually in the publication of his *Salamanders of the Family Plethodontidae*. In the preface to this classic addition to herpetological literature, he gave credit to the late Leonhard Stejneger, of the United States National Museum, for focusing his attention upon salamanders instead of snakes, a more glamorous group that even to this day appeals most to young herpetologists. Despite this advice, Dr. Dunn did not neglect the serpents, for he published many papers about them, and a number of snakes were included among the several dozen new species of reptiles and amphibians that he discovered and made known to science.

It was in the American tropics, however, that Dr. Dunn did the bulk of his field work. He collected in Cuba and Jamaica, he spent a year in Colombia, he traveled extensively in Mexico, and his expeditions to Panama and Costa Rica exceeded a dozen in number. In town or in the wilderness he was constantly collecting specimens, seeking novelties and adding to his great fund of knowledge of the Neotropical fauna. One of his most rugged and most ambitious explorations took him into the little known Peninsula de Azuero, that thrusts southward west of the Gulf of Panama like the heel of a misshapen shoe. On these trips he was aided by a grant from the American Philosophical Society, by a Guggenheim fellowship, and by assistance from the Gorgas Memorial Institute of Tropical and Preventive Medicine. In collaboration with Dr. Herbert C. Clark, director of the Gorgas laboratory, Dr. Dunn undertook a unique census of the snakes of Panama. In clearing land for banana plantations, the laborers frequently encountered serpents that they promptly decapitated with their machetes. Through the cooperation of the overseers, the heads were dropped into containers of preservative, and they eventually reached Dr. Dunn's office. Several thousand heads, plus a considerable

number of small snakes that were preserved entire, furnished a rich source of data for snake-population studies and an analysis of the snake fauna in the vicinities of several collecting stations in Panama.

Only twice did he venture into the Old World. He was a member of the Douglas Burden Expedition to Komodo in the East Indies in 1926, and he used part of his Guggenheim fellowship to examine types of snakes in European museums in 1928.

Dr. Dunn served at one time or another on the staffs of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, the American Museum of Natural History, the Museum of Comparative Zoology, and the United States National Museum. One of his major, but virtually unknown, contributions to herpetology was his work in curating the reptile and amphibian collection at the Philadelphia Academy, for which he received no compensation. This important collection, rich in types and historic significance, had long been inactive, largely because the academy staff did not include a herpetologist. For almost a decade, Dr. Dunn devoted at least one full day each week to the formidable chore of rearranging and labeling the collection, preparing a card index, and identifying and cataloging a large number of specimens that had accumulated over a period of years. In this work he was assisted by Mrs. Dunn and, during certain periods, by his graduate students.

Although he was a specialist, and an accomplished one, Dr. Dunn never lost his perspective. In his teaching, his lectures, and his conversations with colleagues, it was obvious that his thinking was based on a comprehension of natural history on a global basis. He was fluent in discussions that concerned geology, physiography, animal distribution, evolution, comparative anatomy, and many other subjects. His papers on such general topics as the classification and phylogeny of the salamanders, the criteria for vertebrate subspecies, species, and genera, and the key and arrangement of the New World genera of the snake family Colubridae give some indication of the breadth of his interests.

An appreciation of Dr. Dunn's knowledge and ability has been expressed by a colleague—"What a shame that a man who knew so much and who could have contributed so much more to his field should have died so young."

ROGER CONANT

Philadelphia Zoological Garden
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

A great nation assailed by war has not only its frontiers to protect, it must also protect its good sense.—ROMAIN ROLLAND.