



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEY

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PHOTOS available from Biological Survey

SMALLEST, LARGEST LAND MAMMALS IN NORTH AMERICA IN BIOLOGICAL SURVEY COLLECTION

The smallest mammal in North America, a tiny shrew less than 3 inches long from tip of nose to tip of tail, and the largest of all existing meat eaters, the Kodiak bear, are two of the more than 136,600 specimens in the North American mammal collection of the Bureau of Biological Survey, United States Department of the Interior, it was announced today. The Biological Survey collection is limited to specimens of recent North and Middle American species and has the largest representation of any collection in the world.

In the Survey's mammal laboratory in Washington, D. C., are 96,787 rodents (squirrels, pocket gophers, mice, rats, etc.); 20,108 flesh-eating mammals (bears, weasels, wolves, cats, etc.); 7,554 moles and shrews; 5,697 hares, rabbits, and pikas; 3,870 bats; 1,869 even-toed hoofed mammals (pigs, deer, oxen, etc.); 523 opossums; 122 monkeys; 72 edentates (sloths, armadillos, etc.); 9 tapirs and horses; 1 walrus; and 1 seal.

The most valuable specimens in the collection are the types and topotypes, which are the specimens upon which all scientists base their descriptions of the animals. Of the more than 2,500 species and subspecies of mammals recognized in North America today, 1,261 were described, or first recognized, by Biological Survey workers.

Among these type specimens, or first-described animals, is the tiny 3 inch shrew, which was found by the Biological Survey naturalist, Edward A. Preble, along the Potomac River in 1903. The Kodiak bear, the largest species of all existing carnivores, or meat eaters, was collected by B. J. Bretherton on Kodiak Island, Alaska, in 1893.

"The collection is indispensable in connection with the administration of wildlife along the many lines embraced in the general activities of the Biological Survey," said Dr. H. H. T. Jackson, in charge of the Section of Wildlife Surveys, Division of Wildlife Research.

Among the notable collectors of original, or type, specimens was Dr. C. Hart Merriam, the first Chief of the Biological Survey. He described 651 of the type specimens now in the collection. Major Edward A. Goldman, still active in the Survey, has described 266 new forms. Other early members of the Bureau's staff, either active or retired, who have described several new species, include Vernon Bailey, A. H. Howell, Dr. E. W. Nelson, Dr. W. H. Osgood, E. A. Preble, and Dr. H. H. T. Jackson.

In 1891, a Biological Survey expedition to Death Valley collected some 5,000 mammal specimens. This comprises the largest contribution from a single expedition. Dr. Nelson and Major Goldman set the record for a team of collectors when they were credited with collecting more than 17,000 mammals during a period of years.

Since 1916, when the Biological Survey was asked to undertake the control of predatory animals, the collection of carnivores has increased until today the Bureau has 3,523 coyotes, 986 wolves, and 540 mountain lions--the largest study series of North American predators in the World.

A description of the collection was recently issued as a mimeographed leaflet, BS-153, entitled "The Biological Survey Mammal Collection." Compiled in the Section of Wildlife Surveys, Division of Wildlife Research, the leaflet is available to scientists and others interested in mammalogy upon request to the Biological Survey.

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