



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Alexander Wetmore Oral History Interviews, 1974

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Smithsonian Institution Archives
Washington, D.C.
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Collection Overview

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| Repository: | Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu |
| Title: | Alexander Wetmore Oral History Interviews |
| Identifier: | Record Unit 9504 |
| Date: | 1974 |
| Extent: | 2 audiotapes (Reference copies). 4 digital .mp3 files (Reference copies). |
| Creator:: | Wetmore, Alexander, 1886-1978, interviewee |
| Language: | English |

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9504, Alexander Wetmore Oral History Interviews

Historical Note

Alexander Wetmore (1866-1978), B.A., University of Kansas, 1912 and Ph.D., George Washington University, 1920, pursued a career of ornithological field work beginning with the U.S.D.A. Bureau of Biological Survey from 1910-1924. After working informally with Smithsonian collections for many years, he was appointed Superintendent of the National Zoological Park in 1924 and as Assistant Secretary in charge of the U.S. National Museum in 1925. In 1945 he became Secretary of the Institution and during his tenure oversaw the acquisition of the Canal Zone Biological Area. After his retirement in 1952, he continued as a Research Associate of the Institution. Dr. Wetmore was well-known for his research and publications of North and South American birds.

Introduction

The Smithsonian Institution Archives began its Oral History Program in 1973. The purpose of the program is to supplement the written documentation of the Archives' record and manuscript collections with an Oral History Collection, focusing on the history of the Institution, research by its scholars, and contributions of its staff. Program staff conduct interviews with current and retired Smithsonian staff and others who have made significant contributions to the Institution. There are also interviews conducted by researchers or students on topics related to the history of the Smithsonian or the holdings of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

Wetmore was interviewed for the Oral History Project because he has made significant scholarly and administrative contributions to the Smithsonian during 50 years of service.

Descriptive Entry

Wetmore was interviewed by Miriam Freilicher on April 18 and May 8, 1974. The interviews consist of reminiscences of his field work, expeditions for the Biological Survey, administration, changes, growth and finances of the U.S. National Museum, reminiscences of colleagues, notably John L. Keddy, Louise M. Pearson, and James Zetek, and the acquisition of the Canal Zone Biological Area.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Interviews
- Oral history
- Ornithology

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Compact discs
- Electronic records
- Transcripts

Names:

- Assistant Secretary in Charge of the United States National Museum
- Canal Zone Biological Area
- Deiss, William A., interviewer
- Freilicher, Miriam S., interviewer
- Henson, Pamela M., interviewer
- Keddy, John L.
- National Zoological Park (U.S.)
- Pearson, Louise M.
- Smithsonian Institution. Office of the Secretary
- Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute
- United States. Bureau of Biological Survey
- Wetmore, Alexander, 1886-1978
- Zetek, James, 1886-1959

Geographic Names:

- Barro Colorado Island (Panama)

Container Listing

Interviews

- Interviews **Interview 1: April 18, 1974**
- Interviews Includes Wetmore's reminiscences of early field work, career with Biological Survey, and early years at the Smithsonian in administration, c. 1909-1944.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-33, of audio recording, 1 hour.
[Digital Content: Transcript - Front Matter](#)
[Digital Content: Transcript - Part One](#)
- Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1 hour
 Note:
 - Original Masters: 1 7" low torque reel-to-reel analog tape
 - Preservation Masters: 4 7" low torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 2 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 1 cassette audiotape; 2 digital .mp3 files.
- Interviews **Interview 2: May 8, 1974**
- Interviews Includes Wetmore's reminiscences of the U.S. National Museum, the effects of the Great Depression, his term as Secretary, acquisition of the Canal Zone Biological Area and field work, c. 1920-1974.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 34-54, of audio recording, 1 hour.
[Digital Content: Transcript - Part Two](#)
- Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1 hour
[Audio: Audio clip corresponding to pp. 37-38 in oral history transcript](#)
[Audio: Audio clip corresponding to pp. 42-43 in oral history transcript](#)
[Audio: Audio clip corresponding to discussion of John Enos Graf in oral history](#)
[Audio: Audio clip corresponding to discussion of South American Expedition in oral history](#)
[Audio: Audio clip corresponding to pp. 46-47 in oral history transcript](#)
 Note:
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