



Smithsonian Institution Archives

David Challinor Oral History Interviews, 1999

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	David Challinor Oral History Interviews
Identifier:	Record Unit 9599
Date:	1999
Extent:	27 audiotapes (Reference copies).
Creator::	Challinor, David, interviewee
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9599, David Challinor Oral History Interviews

Historical Note

David Challinor (1920-2008), a science administrator, received his B.A. from Harvard University in 1943 and his masters and Ph.D. in forest ecology from Yale University in 1959 and 1966. He served as deputy director of the Peabody Museum at Yale from 1960 to 1966, while S. Dillon Ripley served as director there. He followed Ripley, eighth Smithsonian Secretary, to the Smithsonian, serving as special assistant for tropical biology from 1966 to 1967, deputy director from 1967 to 1969 and then director from 1969 to 1971 of the Office of International Activities, as Assistant Secretary for Science from 1971 to 1987, and in 1988 began his service as special advisor to the Secretary. He was then named senior scientist at the National Zoological Park. At the Smithsonian, he oversaw all of the science bureau activities, including the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), National Zoological Park (NZP) and its Conservation and Research Center, Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, Smithsonian Center for Materials Research and Education, Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI), as well as special projects in conservation and museum administration.

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.

David Challinor was interviewed for the Oral History Collection to document his career as a Smithsonian science administrator especially as Assistant Secretary for Science where he coordinated Smithsonian scientific research priorities.

Descriptive Entry

Challinor was interviewed sixteen times in 1998 and 1999 by Smithsonian Institution Archives Historian Pamela M. Henson. The interviews cover his childhood, education, research career, and administrative career at the Peabody Museum at Yale University and the Smithsonian Institution. The collection consists of 24.0 hours of audiotape recording and circa 720 pages of transcript.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Astrophysics
- Biological stations
- Biology -- Fieldwork
- Conservation biology
- Ecology
- Endangered species
- Forests and forestry
- Interviews
- Museums -- Administration
- Museums -- Management
- Natural history
- Nature conservation
- Oral history
- Zoos

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Transcripts

Names:

- Challinor, David
- Conservation and Research Center (National Zoological Park)
- Harvard University
- Henson, Pamela M., interviewer
- National Museum of Natural History (U.S.)
- National Zoological Park (U.S.)
- Peabody Museum of Natural History
- Ripley, S. Dillon (Sidney Dillon), 1913-2001
- Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory
- Smithsonian Center for Materials Research and Education
- Smithsonian Environmental Research Center
- Smithsonian Institution. Assistant Secretary for Science
- Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute

Yale University

Container Listing

Interviews

- Interviews **Interview 1: August 27, 1998**
- Interviews Covers his youth, early interests, education, and work with S. Dillon Ripley at the Peabody Museum at Yale University, 1920-1965.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-41, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.
- Interviews **Interview 2: September 11, 1998**
- Interviews Discusses his family history; work with Ripley at the Peabody Museum; graduate work in forestry; decision to leave the Peabody and join Ripley at the Smithsonian, first as a special assistant for tropical biology at the National Museum of Natural History, working with William Stern and F. Raymond Fosberg, then as director of the Office of International Activities, work with the Foreign Currency Program, Peace Corps Environmental Program, and Office of Environmental Science, and reminiscences of William L. Warner, 1930s-1970s.
- [Digital Content: David Challinor, Hope Cooke, and the King of Sikkim, c. 1971. \(Image no. 71-2731.3\)](#)
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-44, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.
- Interviews **Interview 3: September 30, 1998**
- Interviews Continues his discussion of the Office of International Activities, especially the Aldabra Program, Foreign Currency Program, acquisition of the ship, *Phykos*, and his appointment as Assistant Secretary for Science, development of the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, 1960s-1980s.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-41, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.
- Interviews **Interview 4: October 19, 1998**
- Interviews Discusses the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in-depth, as well as the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, 1960s-1980s.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-41, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.
- Interviews **Interview 5: November 3, 1998**

- Interviews Continues discussion of STRI, and overall management and planning meetings for the science bureaus, 1960s-1980s.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-48, of audiotape recording, 2.0 hours.
- Interviews **Interview 6: March 17, 1999**
- Interviews Focuses on the National Zoological Park, its director Theodore H. Reed, and expansion into animal breeding and behavioral research, including the Conservation and Research Center at Front Royal, Virginia, and development of the NZP Master Plan, 1970s-1990s.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-61, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.
- Interviews **Interview 7: March 23, 1999**
- Interviews Continues discussion of the NZP Master Plan and program growth, endangered animals such as the golden lion tamarin, Prezwalski's horses, black-footed ferrets, and clouded leopards, 1970s-1990s.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-30, of audiotape recording, 1.0 hour.
- Interviews **Interview 8: April 15, 1999**
- Interviews Continues discussion of the NZP, including researchers John Eisenberg and Devra Kleimann, relationship with Friends of the National Zoo, and the Easter Monday celebration at the Zoo, 1960s-1990s.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-37, of audiotape recording, 1.0 hour.
- Interviews **Interview 9: April 26, 1999**
- Interviews Discusses the relationship between the National Zoo and the Friends of the National Zoo (FONZ), developed by Director Ted Reed; role of FONZ in educational and support activities; increase in volunteers for such projects as animal watch; research by Helmut K. Buechner; Easter Monday celebration at the Zoo; grant funding; role of Michael H. Robinson as director and his concept of the "biopark"; extension of the Zoo Master Plan; began discussion of the Smithsonian Marine Station at Fort Pierce, especially the *Johnson-Sea Link* and Harbor Branch Foundation problems; and role of Mary E. Rice in developing Fort Pierce as a Smithsonian facility, 1970s-1990s.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-34, of audiotape recording, 1.0 hour.
- Interviews **Interview 10: May 5, 1999**

Interviews Focuses on the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory (SAO); development of the Multiple-Mirror Telescope with the University of Arizona with disks from the U.S. Air Force; innovative design elements; National Science Foundation limits on funding; dynamics of a multi-institutional project; chess games on mainframe computer; development of the Center for Short-Lived Phenomena; Prairie Network of the Meteorite Photography and Recovery Project had limited successes; surplus property crisis when staff member mistakenly traded for other equipment; the subsequent internal audit system later allowed SI to own ships for coral reef research; challenges of managing a complex science organization; Secretary Ripley's approach to Congressional hearings; transition from Fred L. Whipple to George B. Field as SAO director; Field's management style; relationships with Harvard University over the Center for Astrophysics; appointment of Irwin Shapiro, of MIT, as director in 1983; important role of assistant directors Carlton Tillinghast and John G. Gregory; role of Robert A. Brooks as Undersecretary, followed by Michael Collins and Phillip S. Hughes; Brooks' relationship with Regent James E. Webb, chair of the Executive Committee; Chief Justice Warren Burger and his relationship to S. Dillon Ripley and the Smithsonian; Challinor's image of the "barons and bishops" - Assistant Secretaries and central administrators, and their roles at the Smithsonian; SAO "Mafia" of great Italian astrophysicists, including Guiseppe Colombo, Riccardo Giacconi, Luigi Jacchia and others; role of Board of Regents in securing funding; and increasingly important role of computers in Smithsonian research, 1970s-1990s.

[Digital Content: Warren E. Burger, David Challinor and and Joan Ridder Challinor, c. 1978. \(Image no. 78-15672-22\)](#)

[Digital Content: Assistant Secretary David Challinor and Chief Justice Warren E. Burger, c. 1978. \(Image no. 78-3929-13\)](#)

Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-66, of audiotape recording, 1.0 hour.

Interviews **Interview 11: May 26, 1999**

Interviews Completed discussion of SAO, especially the Satellite Tracking Program; LEGOS, satellite replacement for Baker-Nunn cameras; phased out splitting positions with Harvard, eventually were full-time for one of the two organizations; Museum of Natural History director position turned over from T. Dale Stewart to Richard S. Cowan to Porter M. Kier; issues with work of Richard Sorensen in Department of Anthropology; Department of Botany's F. Raymond Fosberg, Walter E. Adey, and Eddie Ayensu, in addition to Cowan; in Paleobiology had Marty Buzas and Richard E. Grant; building of Museum Support Center with Vincent Wilcox as director; successful team of Porter M. Kier and James Mello as director and assistant director of Natural History Museum; succeeded by Richard Fiske and Robert S. Hoffmann; development of the Senate of Scientists; and state of systematics after Michener Report and the Steere Report in the 1960s; 1960s-1990s.

Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-41, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.

Interviews **Interview 12: June 8, 1999**

Interviews Continued discussion of Steere Report, Michener Report, Belmont Report on systematics; Archbold-Bredin-Smithsonian Biological Survey of Dominica; Marine Mammal Salvage Program; encouragement of fieldwork, such as William Fitzhugh, Dennis Stanford, William Merrill, Bruce D. Smith, Victor Springer, Clyde F. E. Roper, Erle G. Kauffman; grant funding sources; initiation of the SI-wide collections inventory; contrast between well-curated Natural History ethnographic collections and the George Gustav Heye collection that the U.S. Congress pressured the Smithsonian to acquire; issues surrounding repatriation efforts; public use of collections at Naturalists' Center; biodiversity research highlights the importance of collections; balance of staff between researchers and collections care specialists; and limits on collections and culling collections; 1960s-1990s.

Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-39, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.

Interviews **Interview 13: October 20, 1999**

Interviews Discusses the Marine Mammal Program at NMNH; using outside review committees to assess status of programs, including outside grants, pre- and post-doctoral fellows, publication productivity; role of government agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Geological Survey at the NMNH, with staff in residence at the museum; Professional Accomplishments Evaluation Committee tenure reviews of staff; lawsuits over evolution exhibit by Dale Crowley; *Enola Gay* controversy at the National Air and Space Museum; the Research Institute on Immigration and Ethnic Studies run by Roy S. Bryce-La Porte; issues with E. Richard Sorenson and the Human Studies Film Archives; and creation of Institutional Review Boards; 1970s-1990s.

Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-52, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.

Interviews **Interview 14: October 25, 1999**

Interviews Focuses on NMNH with development of the Arctic Studies Center by William Fitzhugh of NMNH; the *Handbook of North American Indians*; Dennis Stanford's Paleo-Indian Project; excavations in the Rift Valley of Africa by Richard Potts and Anna Kay Behrensmeyer; connections to the Mpala Research Station; Investigations of Marine Shallow Water Ecosystems program initiated at Carrie Bow Cay by Klaus Ruetzler; long-term ecological monitoring project at Smithsonian Environmental Research Center and at Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute; Walter Adey's coral reef research program; Pacific Ocean Biological Survey Program; Secretary Ripley's instructions that all Smithsonian research must be publishable; encouragement of NMNH staff to do field work which resulted in the creation of the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center and Smithsonian Marine Station at Fort Pierce; dangers of field work, such as tepuis in Venezuela; reminiscences of important visitors such as Emperor Hirohito, Indira Ghandi, Queen Elizabeth II; Meredith Leam Jones' research on the Galapagos Rift fauna; formation of the Senate of Scientists and its impact on the museum;

Smithsonian Science Information Exchange transfer to the Department of Commerce; limitations on Smithsonian Research Awards; 1960s-1990s.

Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-52, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.

Interviews **Interview 15: November 2, 1999**

Interviews Addresses the crisis at the National Air and Space Museum after the 1970 Thompson Committee hearings in the U.S. Congress; initiating design and construction of Mall building; hiring of Michael Collins as director; role of Barry Goldwater as National Air and Space Museum advocate and a Smithsonian Regent; roles of subsequent directors Noel W. Hinnners, Walter J. Boyne, Martin Harwit and Donald Engen; military vs. civilian influence at NASM; additional of scholars to curatorial staff, such as David H. DeVorkin; and how public services such as the restaurant, Einstein planetarium and IMAX theater supported the museum; 1960s-1990s.

Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-63, of audiotape recording, 2.0 hours.