

NATURE NOW

# Water Contains Myriad of Life

By LYDIA KING FREHSE  
Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric

Anyone who has lived long at the water's edge must be impressed with the diversity of life forms which it holds. If it is a salt water habitat it is altogether possible that in it there will be represented all nine of the existing major animal phyla, plus a large number of species of aquatic plants. Most of these had their origin in the sea.

Only a few major animal groups, like the insects and the vertebrates, seem to have originated through adaptations made in fresh water or on the land.

A fresh water habitat is somewhat more restrictive as to these major groupings, while land habitats hold the greatest proliferation of species.

In the plant world, these latter occur among the fungi and seed plants. In the animal world, they are found among the insects and vertebrates.

However, if we judge the abundance of life by the number of individual organisms, the sea would probably win again. This is due to the millions of various forms of microscopic life which live in its warmer surface layers.

FRESH AND salt water each furnish a distinctive habitat and each harbor species that have never lived elsewhere. Others, like fish, have originated in the sea but some species have adapted themselves to fresh water. Yet others, like the whale, have undergone their basic evolution on land and have since returned to an underwater mode of life.

By far the largest number of aquatic plants and animals are so tiny that hundreds live in a single drop of water and make up an important food source for larger plants and animals. Together they are called "plankton."

The weight of their microscopic bodies adds up to tons of food which are eaten by crustaceans, mollusks and fish. Even the mighty bowhead whale subsists on minute animals which it strains from gallons of sea water by first passing it through a series of whalebone

plates which hang from the roof of its mouth.

VIEWED FROM the dock on this summer morning much of the life of this quiet lake is hidden from my sight. Only a trained biologist could name the rods and spirals, the circles and oblongs which are its microscopic plants and animals.

If I could sift its sandy bottom I would find countless eggs of aquatic insects and many feeding nymphs. A myriad of damsel and dragonfly eggs are attached to submerged stones and sticks harbor thousands of mayfly eggs and freshwater worms. A host of water bugs, back swimmers and water striders live on or near its surface.

Every lake holds its quota of mollusks, of which the fresh water clam is the most commonly seen. During the night a large specimen has left its trail mark in the shallows. It moves by extending the clammy foot through a crack in the partly relaxed bivalve, repeatedly thrusting it like a wedge into the sandy bottom.

LITTLE schools of silver minnows swim over my feet and last night's waves have cast up a dead snag from the weed bed around the bend.

A small leopard frog has found his way into the bow of our canoe. Although he resists my hand, he is glad to be restored to the water's coolness.

Yesterday's casualty was a dead mud-puppy washed ashore. These amphibians spend their entire lives in the water, breathing through tufts of bushy, velvety gills which are located just behind the head like a ruff. Their short legs are only strong enough for crawling on the bottom of the lake. They are held useless against the body while swimming, and the fish-like tail is used as a rudder.

Scientists tell us that these crea-

tures with a look that is half-reptile, half-fish, are fortunate to eat. However, their chief value is as specimens for dissection work in biological laboratories.

THE FRESH water habitat offers many advantages to living organisms. Food is plentiful and easily acquired. The body needs less protection, since there is less exposure and less variation in temperature than on the land. The great disadvantage of the fresh water habitat is its trans-

ient character, for a puddle may dry up overnight, a marsh may be drained in a few years and a lake may vanish in a thousand years.

Therefore there is more continuity for life within the protection of an ocean which is not subjected to these short-term changes.

"Every amateur photographer, whether he uses a box brownie or a fancy foreign-made camera, should send in shots taken in H-C-M-A parks," said Eason Chun, president of the Greater Detroit Camera Club Council.

"This is a snapshot contest, not a photographic salon," Chun explained. "As a matter of fact, a ten-year old's lucky shot stands as good a chance as any."

Four trophies and eight gift certificate prizes are offered for black and white prints and color photographs taken in any of the five parks of the Authority. Print size limit is eight by ten inches and color slides should be mounted. There is no entry fee. Entries should be sent to the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority photo contest, 1750 Guardian Building, Detroit 26, before September 30.

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