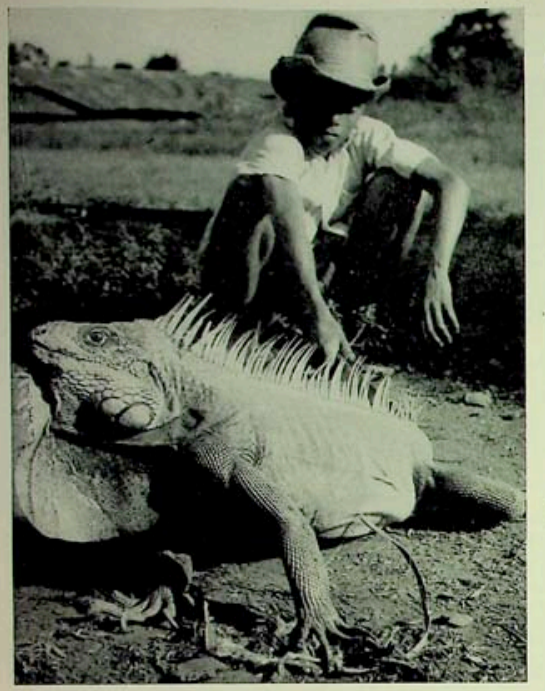
THE AMERICAN SWEDISH MONTHLY

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BUILDING HELSINKI'S STADIUM FOR THE 1952 OLYMPIC GAMES

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Natives of Ecuador. A 6-foot iguana.

A Naturalist at Large

Rolf Blomberg describes thrilling adventures hunting zoological specimens in many parts of the world.

By Rolf Blomberg

"YOU have an awfully queer taste," I have often been told by stay-at-home people. "You spend most of your time in the jungles and other forsaken places when you could live in a decent, civilized country, and you show more happiness about your ugly snakes and toads than other people do about their first born. How come? How did you ever happen to get into that strange business?" I have told them, and they are responsible for my typing down something about my "strange business" as an animal collector.

My interest in zoology developed early, as well as a strong longing for the tropics, where I would get a chance to see stranger animals than those of my home country, Sweden. I had a friend, now a successful author of animal books, who was a kindred spirit. As youngsters we started to prepare ourselves for what we believed was our future mission, to lead great scientific expeditions to blank spots on the maps and bring home enormous collections for our Swedish museums. In our imagination the forests around Stockholm became impenetrable jungles, and the small lake, edged by reeds and shady trees, where we caught all kinds of little creeping and swimming things, became the Bangweolo Swamps of darkest Africa. I had become acquainted with them in a travel book. We experienced many strange things on our expeditions, and these became even stranger in the strongly developed imagination of my friend. I remember that his mother once reproached him for exaggerating a great deal when he told her about "a colossal butterfly which had come out of the forest like a thunder clap."

Although young, we succeeded in getting together rather large collections. When I looked at them a few years ago, I was really astonished at both their quantity and quality. We learned the most important things about how to prepare, preserve and label our material. We pinned butterflies and beetles in cigar boxes, and stretched the insects' wings and legs nicely in the proper way. We put snakes and lizards, frogs and fishes in alcohol, and my friend stuffed birds so that they looked almost alive. We spouted out Latin by the yard, like real professors.

One of the most precious specimens in my collection was a flea, a rare insect in Stockholm. One Christmas Eve, of all times, my mother caught that vermin on one of my brothers. Before she got a chance to kill it, I persuaded her to give it to me for my collection. It was a beautiful thing. My friend had no fleas, and he was utterly envious.

Other precious things were brightly colored butterflies from the Amazon and beetles from East Africa with a very queer appearance. Those had been given to me by an entomologist of the State Museum of Natural History. One day, I knew, I myself would roam around in the tropical parts of the world and see the same beautiful and queer insects in their natural surroundings.

Of course, we brought home quite a lot of living animals too, and I am still astonished at the tolerance of our parents when they saw our nice homes slowly changing into zoos. I had a young fox, which was especially cute and used to chew up my father's cigars and empty his glass of punsch, if he didn't watch it carefully. I had other little pets —many kinds of birds and aquarium fishes. As most boys do, I also kept white mice. I started off with a couple of them, but they were enormously prolific, and I ended up with nearly a hundred. At last I lost control of them; I never knew exactly how many I had and didn't notice if some of them escaped. One poor little thing we found pressed flat in the big family Bible —only God knows how that happened — mother found one when she put her hands in her muff, and another one drowned itself in a bowl of soup.

At 14 I had my first chance to get a sniff of more southerly regions when I accompanied my mother and one of my brothers on a trip to the Mediterranean. It was a fantastic experience. For the first time I saw the ocean with its dolphins, whales and flying fish. I saw countries where palm trees, agaves and cacti grew in the open air. I, of course, had with me nets and jars and the other necessary equipment for collecting, and I went back to Sweden with quite a few samples of the Mediterranean fauna. The most exciting specimen was a fat and beautiful spider from Vesuvius. I was told this creeping thing was extremely poisonous. Now I doubt it very much. So much in life is just illusion. The journey to the Mediterranean had started me off, and as soon as I had finished school I made the greatest efforts to get to the tropics. I had hundreds of projects and ideas, but the obstacles were many more. At last, however, the great day arrived when I could wave farewell to Sweden. My destination was the far-away Galapagos Archipelago, and the main purpose of the trip to make as complete a collection as possible of the strange fauna of these Pacific islands for the State Museum of Natural History in Stockholm. I stayed eight months on "The Enchanted Islands," and during this unforgettable time I got acquainted with giant tortoises, marine iguanas and pygmy penguins, and was able to get together quite a lot of zoological material. The adventures were many, and I must tell about the most nerve-wracking one.

A Norwegian fisherman and I were sailing through the narrow channel between the South Seymour and Indefatigable Islands. I asked the Norwegian to leave me on a small reef laid bare by the low tide, and fetch me again when the tide set in. My plan was to collect mollusks and other marine animals, of which there were plenty. He did as I asked him and then went off to the fishing grounds, while I waded around and collected all kinds of living things on the rocks and in the water. However, the tide started to come in, and the water rose quicker than I had realized. After about an hour there was only a small stone above the sea, so I sat down on it and waited. But no fishing boat came into sight. The sea rose higher and higher, the stone was now under water. It soon reached my ankles and then my knees. And still no boat in sight! For an instant I thought I could swim over to one of the nearby islands, but I gave up the idea with a sense of dismay when I saw the triangular shark fins cruising ominously in the channel.

The tide rose righer, and the water was now around my waist. A huge shark swam swiftly toward me and started circling around warily. I felt my heart pop into my mouth, and I again scanned the horizon, and saw at last the white dot of a fishing boat steering to the channel. From the corner of my eye I could see the dot slowly, very slowly growing bigger, while at the same time, with my knife held high in my hand, I kept a watch on the shark circles becoming narrower and narrower.



The author and a pet.

With my free hand I waved eagerly. Fortunately the boat got to me first.

My Norwegian friend greeted me with relief. "I really thought the sharks had you," he said. "I had trouble with the engine and tried to sail against the current, but it proved too strong. Believe me, I also got panicky when I was trying to fix the engine."

After 8 months on the Galapagos, I returned to the South American mainland and shipped my collections to Sweden. I then made a trip which I had often dreamed of —crossing South America from the Pacific to the Atlantic, over the Andes and through the Amazon basin. I took my time, lived like an Indian, hunting and collecting to my heart's content. But as bad luck would have it, while I was on the Aguarico River, a tributary of

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How to feed a snake.



NATURALIST

(*Continued from page 15*)

the Napo, my canoe overturned and months of collecting work were lost. To make matters worse, I got sick and didn't fully recover until I was back home again.

Only half a year later I was again roaming around in the same jungle regions. For several months my headquarters were with the headhunting Jibaro Indians, who in the first instance wanted to collect a Swedish head. But once they had gotten over their superstitious belief that I was there to harm them, they helped me efficiently in acquiring new, interesting species of the jungle fauna.

Homeward bound from Ecuador on a Dutch ship, I traveled with a few live giant tortoises I had collected on a second visit to the Galapagos Islands, as well as half a dozen young crocodiles and a long-nosed coati.

In Amsterdam I left the ship and boarded a train for home. On the frontier between Holland and Germany our baggage was inspected by an unsympathetic customs officer, who violently pulled out everything from our trunks and suitcases.

"What's that?" he asked, pointing at the box with the small crocodiles.

"Crocodiles," I answered truthfully. But when my fellow passengers started to laugh, the customs officer thought that I was trying to pull his leg. He tore off the cover of the box and thrust his hand in it, but immediately pulled it back with a surprised and pained expression and with blood on his fingers. The nimblest one of my little crocodiles had given him a nasty nick.

In the Reichshof Hotel in Hamburg, the coati got loose and was hunted through all the corridors of the third floor and down the stairways to the tea room on the main floor, where at last I succeeded in catching him among the dancers. A couple of ladies got a serious shock thinking the coati was a giant rat.

Once in my home in Stockholm, the first thing the coati did was to scratch all the soil out of my mother's flower pots in a hunt for earthworms which, together with pancakes, were his favorite food. He later became a reliable alarm clock for my brother and me, for he was sleeping in our room, and early in the morning he would open his eyes and like a shot dart into my bed. With his long, cold nose he would try to pry my eyelids open. If I still wouldn't open them, pretending to be asleep, he would creep down under my blanket and tickle the soles of my feet, and since I am very ticklish this would send me flying out of my bed. When the coati saw that I was awake, my brother was given the same treatment.

I was soon off on a new journey to the tropics, this time to Borneo and Java, and after a stay of nearly two years in fascinating Indonesia, I not only brought back zoological collections for the museums, but also many living animals for the Gothenburg Aquarium.

(*To be continued*)

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MARIADAHL

(*Continued from page 21*)

church. The pews placed in 1884 served until the oak pews from the Randolph Church were bought in 1938. An annex built on the south wall in 1900 has helped a great deal to beautify the church. Other additions were donated. The beautiful painting over the altar, The Resurrection, was donated by C. J. Dahlberg and family in 1895, and was painted by Olof Grafstrom. Other donations such as candlesticks, a cross and the pulpit have done much to contribute quiet dignity.

The parsonage, at the right of the church, was built later. A basement to the church was completed in 1938, again by donated labor. Crop failures between 1929 and 1936 had prevented its being constructed before. An oak beam which was under the center of the church was removed when the basement was built and replaced by a steel beam. Roughly hewn out by hand, the oak was placed there in 1866. It was still in good condition, and from it J. A. Norquist, of Waterville, Kansas, made a baptismal font and four flower pedestals. The inside stair treads from the basement also were made from it. The 220 rings in the beam indicated its age.

The Mariadahl Church has three main endowment funds. The church endowment fund was begun in 1919 from a donation of $250 by Luther Ferdinand Samuelson. He requested that the money be set aside as a fund, and the interest be used by the congregation for most essential purposes. Several other donations were added to the fund immediately. The contingent fund was started in 1927, for improvement of the property, a kitchen and serving conveniences. The cemetery fund is used for the upkeep and the decoration of the graves. It was started after the death of John A. Johnson by a gift of $100 in his memory. In 1937, the cemetery was expanded by a tract of land 50 feet wide and the full length of the cemetery from the Ekblad estate. Two entrance columns with steel gates were erected in memory of the parents of John and Charlotte Ekblad. In 1938, a stone wall, connecting the old wall standing in front of the church with the pillars, was completed.

The cemetery has more than 300 graves of the earliest immigrants.

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