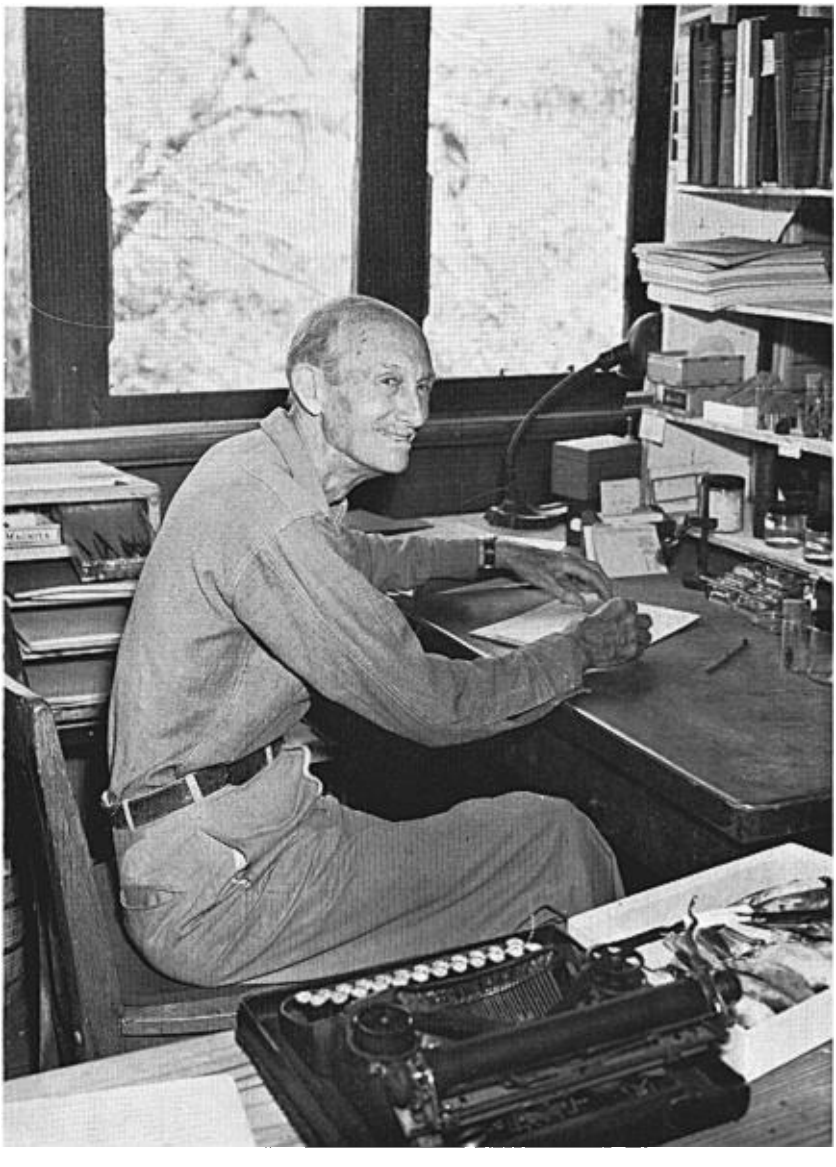

CHARLES WILLIAM BEEBE
1877–1962

Photograph taken at Simla, Arima Valley, Trinidad, in 1952.

IN MEMORIAM: CHARLES WILLIAM BEEBE

LEE S. CRANDALL

CROUCHING in the shadow of a great frost-split boulder, I waited motionless. Behind me, the wall of a jagged cliff rose straight toward the heavens—a giant wall that seemed to set me utterly apart from the world that lay beyond . . . .

Far overhead, against the intense blue of the sky, an Himalayan skylark hung on fluttering wings, sending its jubilant notes down to the sloping snowfields beneath. It was only a dark mote above me, but its melody came through the thin icy air startlingly beautiful and clear. It was springtime, and the small songster felt called upon to tell the joyous fact to the eastern Himalayas, although there was no need for it to carol such an obvious thing, for spring was everywhere for all to see.

The arctic meadow that swept downward toward the deep gorges of the Changthap was dotted, between snow patches, with the warm pink of new-blown primroses. These delicate little flowers bloom and live out their short lives under the frown of eternal winter. Rising high above them, clear cut as diamond against sapphire, were the wonderful peaks of snow—Kinchinjunga the indescribable, and the scarcely less glorious Kabru, silent, mysterious—so isolated that they seemed wholly detached from the earth beneath. Even beside me, winter was fighting for a stronghold; in the purple shadows of the cliff were small, scattered islands of white, pitted with falling drops from overhanging icicles. It was so still that sometimes I could hear the faint tinkle of these drops breaking through the thin ice crust of the snow. But it was a stillness made up of countless sounds—so many of which had no meaning to me. I heard only the song of the lark, and the murmur of a hundred rivulets, trickling along the first stages of their long voyage to the sea.

I waited, watching, careful of every movement, and the afternoon light deepened around me. Then above me, like the rush of a sudden tempest, came the loud beating of wings. A great lammergeier swept over the edge of the cliff out past me into space. It circled again, its red eye gazing fixedly down at me, as if to discern whether death had made me worthy of closer attention.

I watched, always, for the other living things of this meadow—a meadow, though miles above the sea. I could see the faint outline of a vinous-throated pipit, sitting close on its nest. Snow was above and beneath it, but an overhanging bank of turf shielded the small dwelling place. Sometimes a tiny, dark form would creep out into the coarse grass —one of those strange little voles which choose these [bleak] regions for their tunnelled homes. Above them, flies and gnats were dancing in the

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thin air, and on a bit of stunted bamboo a tortoise-shell butterfly flattened its bright wings in a little oasis of yellow light.

*Without warning, the sun dropped behind a distant ridge. It was as if someone had turned out some enormous lamp. Luminous clouds appeared in the air that before had been so clear, and the first whisper of the cold night wind echoed softly in the crags. The insects vanished, and one by one the icicles and rivulets were silenced at the touch of the coming twilight. From a high ravine came the plaintive call of a white-capped redstart, and a gray fox barked from somewhere afar off. Then, in the rich afterglow reflected from the mountains of snow, seven birds appeared over the crest of the ridge. They came slowly, one after the other, and I knew them at once for the Blood Pheasants I had come so far to find.**

WILLIAM BEEBE, a member of the American Ornithologists' Union since 1897 and a Fellow since 1912, died at Simla, Arima Valley, Trinidad, W. I., on June 4, 1962. He was born in Brooklyn, New York, on July 29, 1877, the only child of Charles and Henrietta Maria (Younglove) Beebe. When he was very young (he used to say when he was two years old), the family moved to East Orange, New Jersey. Here the young Beebe grew up, attending the East Orange High School and devoting his spare time to the study of local birds and insects. His collection of well-made bird skins, mostly labeled "Orange Mountain" and carefully sexed and identified, still remains in the possession of the New York Zoological Society.

In 1896 Beebe entered Columbia University where he quickly became even better known to the already harassed naturalists of that institution and the American Museum of Natural History. (His mother, a woman of intense drive, was determined to see that her son should have the benefit of all available aid in the furtherance of his choice of professions and made sure that he met the leaders in the field.) Among those sought out was Professor Henry Fairfield Osborn, then President of the Museum. When, in 1899, the newly organized New York Zoological Society, of which Professor Osborn was First Vice-President, was seeking a promising young ornithologist to head the Department of Birds at its rapidly-developing Zoological Park in the Bronx, the choice fell naturally on young Beebe. This obviously resulted in a crisis of consequence, for if the appointment should be accepted, all hopes of graduation would have to be abandoned. But the urge was too great to be resisted, and on October 16, 1899, Beebe entered the employ of the Zoological Society as an

* William Beebe, approximately as written for *A monograph of the pheasants* (vol. 1, pp. 6–7, 1918), and here quoted from the abridgment of 1926 (*Pheasants: their lives and homes.* New York, Doubleday, Page & Company. See vol. 1, pp. 36–38.) wherein the author inserted minor stylistic improvements.

Assistant Curator. As he once told me, Professor Osborn's opinion, to the effect that a year in the Zoological Park could be more valuable than one of formal courses, had tipped the balance.

So began the career of more than 60 years devoted to the study of life in many categories, on both land and sea, in the interests of the New York Zoological Society. It was not an easy beginning, for while at the turn of the century aviculture was well established in Europe, little progress had been made in this country. American ornithologists, in general, had seldom been exposed to research involving properly kept, captive birds and were basically opposed to such work as "unnatural." Beebe, therefore, had not only to work out, almost unaided, methods for the maintenance of the growing collection for which he had accepted responsibility but to defend the results of such research as time allowed. The Large Bird House in the Zoological Park, completed in 1906, brought new problems as well as criticism. Experienced European aviculturists, outraged by the unprecedented size and scope of the new building, prophesied complete failure. However, with the staunch assistance of Samuel Stacey, an English keeper well-trained in the Zoological Gardens of London, the practical difficulties were overcome, and Beebe gradually became able to begin the field work to which much of his life was devoted.

Following a series of exploratory expeditions, he visited Trinidad and Venezuela in 1908, and British Guiana in 1909. Then, late in December, 1909, he left for the Far East to gather material for his monumental four-volume *A monograph of the pheasants*, a work supported by Colonel Anthony R. Kuser. On his return in March, 1911, he had visited 17 countries and had made intensive field observations from the heights of the Himalayas to the jungles of Malaya. Some time was then devoted to study and the preparation of the manuscript for the *Monograph* but the outbreak of World War I delayed publication. Beebe visited Para in 1915, and in 1916 established at Kalacoon, British Guiana, the first field station of the Zoological Society's Department of Tropical Research, of which he was made Director, at the same time becoming Honorary Curator of Birds of the Zoological Park staff. Later the station removed to Kartabo where work continued, with some interruptions, to 1926. Gaps were caused by the appearance of the first volume of the *Monograph* in 1918, a visit to the Galápagos Islands in the yacht "Noma" in 1923 and another to the Sargasso Sea and the Galápagos in the "Arcturus" in 1925. Research in Haitian waters was undertaken in 1927 and then, in 1928, came the first of 11 years of oceanographic work centering in Bermuda and climaxed by the historic descent to 3,028 feet in Otis Barton's bathysphere in 1934. An important by-product was the rediscovery of the supposedly extinct Cahow in 1935. Expeditions to Baja California in

1936 and the western coast of Central America in 1937 and 1938, all in the "Zaca," furthered the oceanographic studies. The onset of World War II forced abandonment of work in Bermuda waters and in 1942 the Department of Tropical Research returned to jungle studies at Caripito, Venezuela. The next two years were devoted to the classification and arrangement of collected materials, chiefly in the laboratory in the Zoological Park. In 1945, a forest station was installed at Rancho Grande, Venezuela, with the full cooperation of the Venezuelan Government. Work there continued through 1946 and was resumed in 1948, the intervening year having been occupied with study of preserved specimens.

In 1950, the Tropical Research Station at Simla, Arima Valley, Trinidad, was established and there it remains, for Beebe had purchased the Station and the surrounding 228 acres, presenting the title to the Zoological Society. Dr. Beebe continued as Director until his retirement in 1952 with the title of Director Emeritus, when Miss Jocelyn Crane undertook the active operation as Assistant Director. Beebe, however, continued his own research as usual, although hampered somewhat by failing health during the year or two preceding his death.

I first met Will Beebe in 1908 when, as a callow student of Zoological Garden practice, I came under his tutelage. To say that I learned much from him would be not only trite but inadequate. He was a severe task master and expected everyone associated with him not only to work as indefatigably as he himself did, but to adhere to his high scientific standards. These seemed entirely beyond my reach and I could only struggle as best I could. Tall, thin, and vigorous, he enjoyed tennis and in his younger days played a strong game. For occasional relaxation, he lost himself in the mazes of uncounted "whodunits."

Beebe's interests in the natural sciences, at first concentrated on ornithology, gradually enlarged to cover most of the zoological disciplines, as well as oceanography. He had a great gift for writing, characterized by an ability in the description of natural phenomena that few have equalled. His technical papers, which no biographer as yet has fully assembled, number in the hundreds. As I sit in the corner I now occupy in the laboratory of the Zoological Society's Department of Tropical Research, surrounded by a portion of Will Beebe's library, I face five shelves of volumes of special interest. Two are filled by the 23 books (see list appended) that brought him both scientific and literary acclaim. One shelf contains a series of translations of these volumes into many languages, while the others are occupied by bound reprints of his scattered papers. The honors they brought were many, including Sc.D.'s from both Colgate University and Tufts College in 1928, the Daniel Giraud Elliott gold medal of the National Academy of Sciences, and the gold medals of

the Société d'Acclimatation de France and of the New York Zoological Society.

An early marriage to Mary Blair Rice of Virginia, who accompanied him on many of his first expeditions, was eventually dissolved. In 1927, Beebe married Elswyth Thane, who survives him. There were no children by either marriage. Will lies now in Mucurapo Cemetery, in Port of Spain, Trinidad, his chosen resting place.

BOOKS BY WILLIAM BEEBE

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Tropical wild life in British Guiana (with G. Inness Hartley and Paul G. Howes). New York Zool. Soc., 1917. Vol. I. xx + 504 pp. (All published.)
A monograph of the pheasants. H. F. Witherby & Co.; vol. 1, 1918. xlix + 198 pp.; vol. 2, 1921, xv + 269 pp.; vol. 3, 1922, xvi + 204 pp.; vol. 4, xv + 242 pp.
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Pheasants: their lives and homes. Doubleday, Page & Co., 1926. Vol. 1, xxviii + 257 pp.; Vol. 2, xv + 309 pp.
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Pheasant jungles. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1927. xiii + 248 pp.
Beneath tropic seas. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1928. xiii + 234 pp.
Nonsuch, land of water. Brewer, Warren & Putnam, 1932. xv + 259 pp.
Field book of the shore fishes of Bermuda (with John Tee-Van). G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1933. xiv + 337 pp.
Half mile down. Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1934. xix + 344 pp.
Zaca venture. Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1938. xvi + 308 pp.
Book of bays. Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1942. xviii + 302 pp.
High jungle. Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1949. xii + 379 pp.
Unseen life of New York. Duell, Sloan & Pearce and Little, Brown & Co., 1953. xiii + 165 pp.

Also:

Book of naturalists. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1945. xiv + 499 pp. (Anthology, edited by Beebe.)
Exploring with Beebe. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1932. v + 208 pp. (Excerpts from Beebe's writings.)

For assistance in gathering these notes I am much indebted to Miss Jocelyn Crane and Dr. John Tee-Van, both of whom were long closely associated with Dr. Beebe.

New York Zoological Society, The Zoological Park, Bronx Park, New York, New York.