

A Science Service Feature

Released on receipt  
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May 24, 1927

: WHY THE WEATHER .

Mailed May 17, 1927

PHENOLOGY

Phenology has nothing whatever to do with phrenology, and we trust the printer will not misspell our title. The old-fashioned spelling was "phaenology". The word was introduced in 1853, but the subject is much older.

The phenologist records year after year the dates of various seasonal events in the lives of certain selected species of plants and animals, including the first appearance of leaves, blossoms and ripe fruit, the beginning of leaf-fall in the autumn, the arrival and departure of migrating birds, and so forth. Averages from long records thus obtained furnish a means of telling, in any particular year, whether a season is early or late, and how much.

Plants and animals -- especially the former -- serve as meteorological instruments, which, instead of recording only the temperature, or the rainfall, or some other single element of weather, register the combined effects of all weather phenomena that have any influence on life and growth. Phenological statistics and charts, so far as they exist, are useful to farmers as a guide in selecting early or late varieties of crops, fruit trees, etc., for planting; not only to enhance the probability of favorable weather, but also to dodge the depredations of insects having a seasonal occurrence. There are many other possible applications of phenological data, and there is great need of stimulating the collection of such data. At one time phenological observers were quite numerous in the United States, but at present there are more in Canada than there are in this country, and a great many more in Europe.

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SCIENCE SERVICE,  
21st and B Sts.,  
Washington, D.C.