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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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CRICKET THERMOMETERS

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Every once in a while somebody "discovers" that there is an exact mathematical relation between the rate at which crickets chirp -- the number of chirps per minute -- and the temperature of the air at the time, and the cricket is accordingly proclaimed to be a marvelous natural thermometer. What are the facts?

In the first place, the periodical "discoveries" on this subject are rather amusing to the professional entomologist, who is aware that the effects of temperature and other atmospheric conditions on the cricket's song have been the subject of painstaking investigation for many years. In 1897 Prof. Dolbear announced that he had found a definite formula for the variation of the chirping rate with temperature, and another formula was published the following year by C.A. and E.A. Bessey. Neither of these formulas was, however, confirmed by Prof. Shull, who made a thorough study of the subject in 1905-06.

It is now generally recognized that, while crickets usually chirp more rapidly with an increase in the temperature, there is no accurate relation involved, so that the insect is at best a "thermoscope" and not a thermometer. An increase in humidity appears to decrease the rate of chirping. Many other factors are, however, concerned in the process.

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