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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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SNOW-EATING

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,  
Authority on Meteorology.

The experience of polar explorers refutes the popular belief that snow is a harmful article of diet. Griffith Taylor, in his account of Scott's last expedition, says: "Personally, I have never felt any ill result from eating snow in the Antarctic, and all our party quenched their thirst in this way." Stefansson, in "The Friendly Arctic," writes: "There is no difficulty in quenching thirsts by eating snow once you have rid yourself of the curious superstition that snow-eating is dangerous."

It appears from recent communications to the journal Science that birds and mammals likewise eat snow with impunity. Charles Macnamara writes from Arnprior, Ontario:

"Winter birds and mammals seem to satisfy thirst in this way even when water is available. In this part of the Ontario valley resident winter birds usually number about 15 species, and excluding the aquatics -- muskrat, mink and beaver -- there are about eight kinds of mammal active in winter. Although the snow lies deep for four months and the ice is often more than two feet thick, there is always open water to be found at rapids and springs. Having in mind the concourse of animals and birds that gather to drink at water-holes in Africa, I have often been struck by the fact that in many years' observation I have never seen in my district the track of a bird or of a terrestrial mammal coming to open water in winter."

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