Clinton Hart Merriam Encyclopedia Article

Clinton Hart Merriam

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Clinton Hart Merriam

1855-1942

American zoologist and a founder of the National Geographic Society. Merriam was noted for bringing major attention to the study of North American land vertebrates and to the biogeographical settings in which they lived. Born in upstate New York, he was trained as a physician at Columbia University. Beginning in 1885 he directed the newly formed Division of Entomology (later the Bureau of Biological Survey) in the federal Department of Agriculture. He left in 1910 to study tribes of disappearing native Americans in California. His thorough field methods, and the many regional biological surveys and major revisions of mammalian genera published under the aegis of the Biological Survey, were very influential well into the twentieth century. His conclusion that temperature was the major determinant in controlling the geographical distribution of animals later underwent considerable revision at other hands but is still considered useful in the western United States.