Simpson, George Gaylord Encyclopedia Article

Simpson, George Gaylord

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Simpson, George Gaylord

American Paleontologist and Biologist 1902-1984

George Gaylord Simpson was born to middle-class parents in Chicago, Illinois, on June 16, 1902. The family soon moved to Colorado, where he became fascinated by the dramatic geology and vertebrate fossils of the West. Graduate work at Yale University culminated in a Ph.D. in Geology in 1926 with a thesis on Mesozoic mammals. Simpson married psychologist Anne Roe and later collaborated with her on several books and conferences about behavior and evolution.

In 1927 Simpson began his thirty-two-year association with the American Museum of Natural History, of which he became curator in 1942. During those years he led expeditions to Mongolia, Patagonia, and Montana and taught at Columbia University. His work in organizing all the known fossil vertebrates of the Mesozoic, Paleocene, and Eocene was summarized in a series of textbooks including: *Tempo and Mode of Evolution* (1944), *The Meaning of Evolution* (1949), and *The Major Features of Evolution* (1952). His most significant achievement may be the application of population genetics to the analysis of the migration of extinct mammals between continents.

From 1959 to 1970 Simpson was professor of vertebrate paleontology at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University. In 1967, at the age of sixty-five, he moved to Tucson to become professor of geosciences at the University of Arizona.

Simpson's lifelong enthusiasm for and contributions to his chosen field were recognized by numerous honorary degrees and medals worldwide. He was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 1941 and the National Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1948. He was cofounder and first president of both the Society of Vertebrate Paleontologists and the Society for the Study of Evolution. George Gaylord Simpson died October 6, 1984.

George Gaylord Simpson's work has helped generations of biology students to better understand the types of animals that lived through the Mesozoic, Paleocene, and Eocene time periods.

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