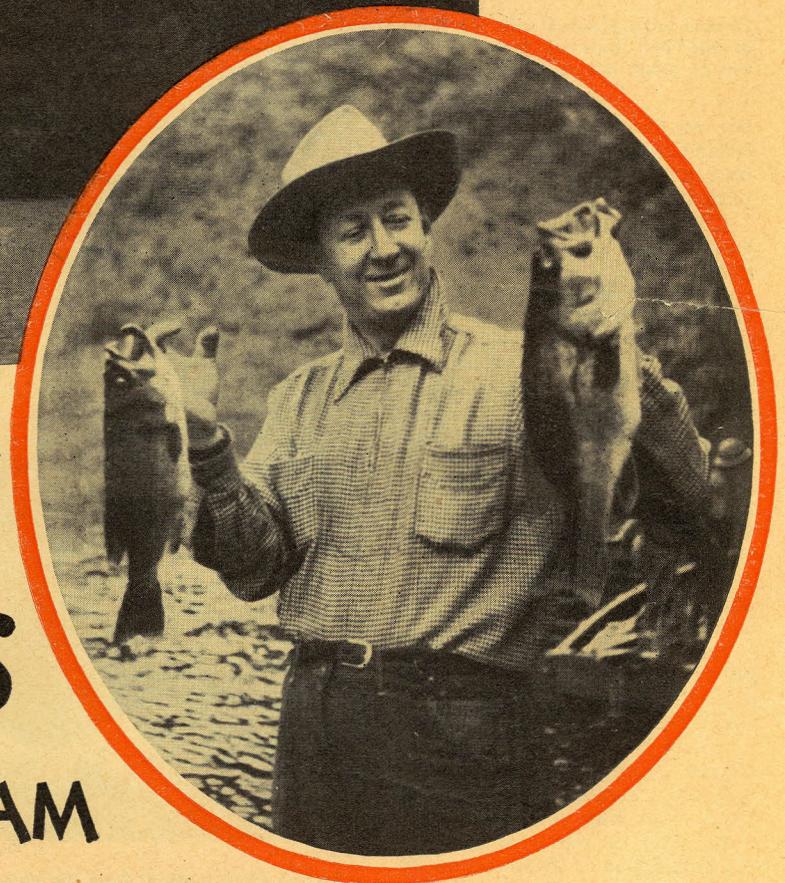
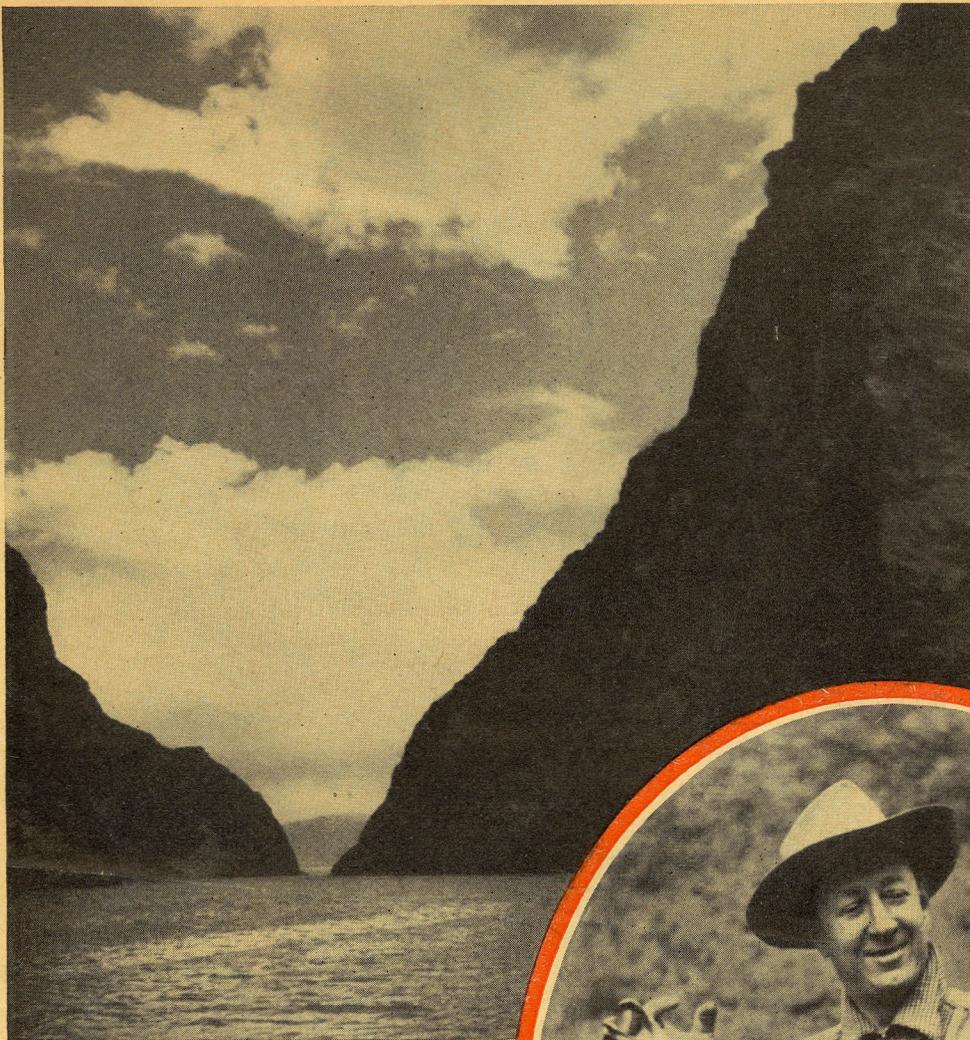


Boulder Canyon as seen from the anglers' boat. Just beyond lies Virgin Basin where the river of that name flows into the Colorado. Below is the author with a couple of the oversize bass taken from the man-made lake



Mystery Bass

OF BOULDER DAM

A FRIEND, who knew that the black bass is a weakness of mine, returned recently from a sight-seeing trip to Boulder Dam and told me he saw an eight-pound largemouth which had been caught in Lake Mead, the giant body of water formed by the world's highest dam.

My friend is not a fisherman, so I had no reason to doubt his word. He said he'd seen the bass, and was sure it weighed eight pounds because the scales said so. Still my mind refused to accept such a tale.

Eight pounds! Incredible, impossible,

and preposterous! Why the lake had been stocked only two years before. And with fry, not grown bass! *Fry!* I tried to convince my friend he'd been seeing things, but he stubbornly held his ground.

"What's so wonderful about an eight-pound bass?" he asked. "Is that so big? Why, I've seen barracuda much bigger at Catalina Island."

Days passed. I couldn't get that bass

out of my mind. Finally, I could stand it no longer, and wired the Las Vegas, Nev., Chamber of Commerce. The reply was prompt: "Fishing excellent."

I telephoned Charlie, who is as fond of bass fishing as a hillbilly is of corn liquor. I told him of the eight-pound mystery bass, and that I was sure the lake had been stocked only two years before. I even pointed out to Charlie that you could feed bass on the stuff they advertise on the radio for building strong kiddies and they wouldn't grow to eight pounds in two years.

Charlie had been busy trying to get his syndicated cartoon finished and in

By **JOE MEARS**



Yarns About Grand Largemouths that Came From Nowhere to Become Giants Lure Two Anglers to Fishing That Most Men Only Dream About

Charlie looks pleased with the size of the first bass of the trip. It was no giant, but no midget, either

the air mail, being two jumps behind schedule like all cartoonists, and he seemed a bit impatient.

"Why the hell call me if you don't believe the yarn?" he growled.

"Well," I replied, "you've never seen Boulder Dam, have you?"

"No."

"Neither have I. And I've always wanted to. Let's go, just to see the world's highest dam, the world's largest man-made lake, and give the wild-west town of Las Vegas a gander. We'll take our bass tackle along. But we'll go for the scenery."

"Sorry," he said. "I'm too busy. Some time later, but not this week-end."

Half an hour later, the telephone operator called me from a conference with the boss. It was Charlie.

"I can be ready to leave by 8 o'clock tonight," he said. "It's only about five hours' run to Las Vegas, the way you drive."

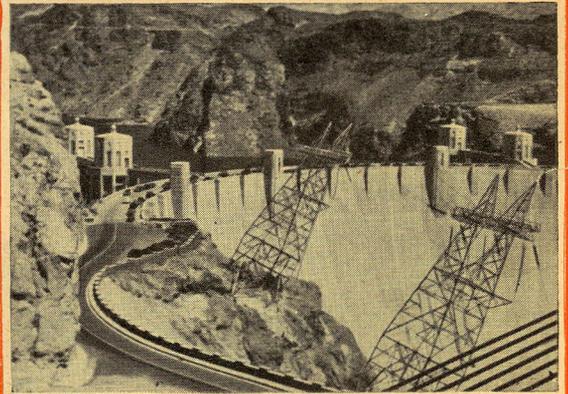
We were on our way by 7:30.

Charlie has a swell sense of humor. That's probably why he got a big laugh next morning at the Lake Mead boat landing when we found no boats for hire, loan, or even to steal. The reason was that 1,200 school children were on an excursion to Boulder Dam. All the boats had been in steady use for a week. "What about that wire?" demanded Charlie.

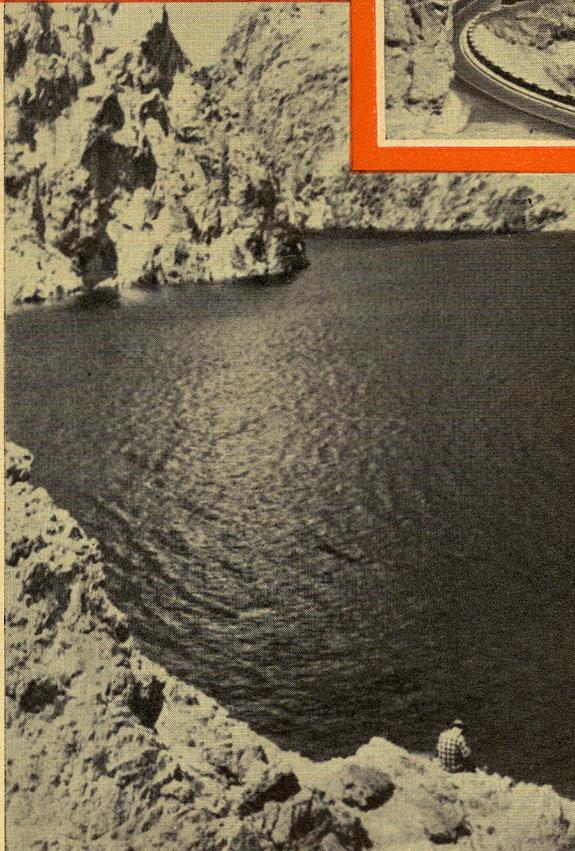
Then it dawned on me I'd wired only about fishing, not about boats.

"Then we did come to see the dam?" grinned Charlie. "At least we can drive across it. It'll be educational."

I'm glad we couldn't get a boat the first day. Otherwise, we probably



Downstream view of Boulder, the world's highest dam which created the greatest of artificial lakes



Resting for a moment from the oars, Charlie tries fishing from the rugged shores of a huge cove in Boulder Canyon

darlings had gone back to their books and spelling, leaving plenty of boats available on Lake Mead for fishermen.

At the boat landing we met O. P. Senter, park ranger of the Boulder Dam Recreational Area. He was in a cordial mood and talked proudly of future plans for the lake. Plans are under way, he told us, to work out a cooperative agreement between the states of Arizona and Nevada for fishing on Lake Mead. Such a step is necessary to conserve this great recreational attraction. Recently a conference was held, attended by representatives of the Fish and Game Commissions of Arizona and Nevada, the National Park Service, the Bureau of Biological Survey, and the Reclamation Service, at which recommendations for uniform regulations were made to be submitted to the legislatures of the two states.

As the fame of Lake Mead spreads, hundreds of anglers doubtless will fish it. To prepare for this influx, the State of Nevada, in cooperation with the federal government, is rushing plans to enlarge a bass hatchery in Las Vegas, built originally as a PWA project. In fact, according to Ranger Senter, brood stock is being obtained from the lake to provide eggs for future plantings.

What of the future? Will the army of anglers, attracted by tall tales of eight-pound bass, fish the lake out?

"Impossible," said Ranger Senter.

wouldn't have seen the dam, which is a great sight as well as a great engineering achievement. And the view of Lake Mead from Observation Point is actually breathtaking.

And Las Vegas! It's like Hollywood's idea of a wild-west town, with wide-open legal gambling, cow-punchers in ten-gallon hats, miners, and all the local color of the "last frontier" city it claims to be.

The next day was Monday. We were delighted to learn that the 1,200 little

"The lake's too big. Heavy fishing undoubtedly will cut into the supply, but there are enough fish already in the lake to provide natural production of a great supply. Added to this will be large plantings, once the hatchery gets under way. Natural conditions, as to food and water temperature apparently are ideal for bass breeding. The bass are fat, healthy, and have perfect breeding grounds."

But, to be truthful, we were more interested in the present than in the future. While the boat dispatcher was picking out a seaworthy skiff for us, I asked him if the bass were really as big as I'd been told.

"Sure," he said. "Big as eight pounds. I've seen them. Probably stocked in some of the tributary streams years ago, but no one thought of fishing the muddy Colorado River until the dam formed the clear lake. In fact, it's only the past winter that bass of any size have been caught."

"Where do you get them?" Charlie demanded.

"In the coves of the main lake and especially in Boulder Canyon, about twenty miles up the river from here."

We looked at the broad expanse of water. Six to eight miles across. I looked at the sky. Clouds black enough to bear rain hovered over the barren, gaunt peaks that rise abruptly above the lake. Even at a distance, you could see the lake was rough.

The dispatcher guessed my thoughts.

"It does get pretty rough for a small boat," he said. "I'll have one of the boys tow your boat up to Boulder Canyon. It'll be protected up there, and you can troll or cast safely from your boat. It's a beautiful trip, too."

"Let's get going!" urged Charlie.

In a short time, our tackle, lunch, and other paraphernalia were packed in the power boat, our skiff was made fast behind, and we were plowing through the steadily rising waves. As we battled the whitecaps across the lake, we realized how lucky we were to be in a

larger boat. In the skiff, we would have been forced to turn around or to try our luck in the protected coves near the boat landing.

The sheer magnificence of the setting almost made me forget we were going fishing—and that's something. The slate-colored cliffs, barren of trees, rose sharply on either side as we left the lake and headed into Boulder Canyon. This is the cleft in the mountains that gave the dam its name, although the dam actually is in Black Canyon, miles away. The canyon walls are almost vertical and are hundreds of feet high. I wondered how the Empire State building would look standing in the canyon. The first trip up Boulder Canyon is like your first transcontinental airplane trip or your first fish of the season.

Our skiff stood the rough trip well, and we were soon out of the wind where the surface of the water was calmer,

with only a slight downstream current to send wavelets lapping at the sheer granite walls.

As we neared the end of the canyon, Jack, the boatman, called:

"Say! You're in luck!"

"Why?" I asked.

Jack pointed toward a cove in the canyon where two men were casting from a trim, red, outboard-motor boat.

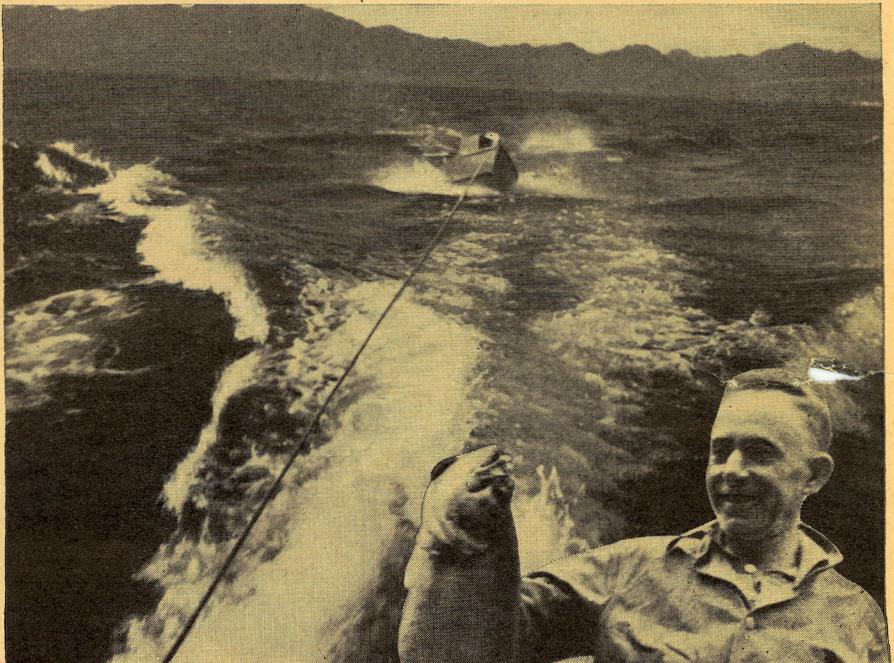
"That's Sam and Bruce," he said. "They're two of the best anglers in these parts. They'll show you where to get the fish."

Sam Stearns and Bruce Sutton welcomed us warmly. They'd come up the day before. Fishing had been fair, Sam said.

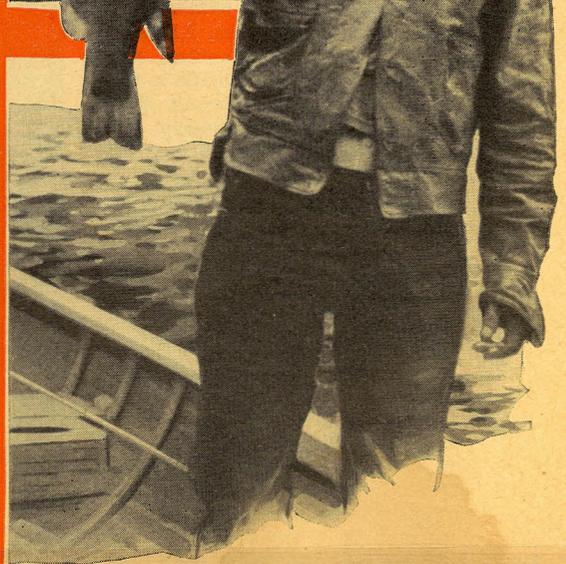
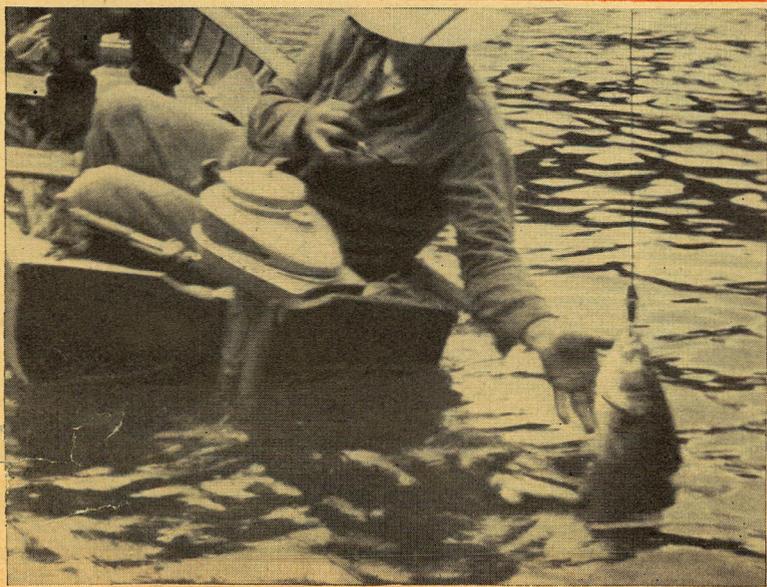
"Fair?" I asked.

Sam pulled a large-mouthed bass from a gunny sack. I'll swear it must have weighed all of six pounds. I almost fell out (Continued on page 79)

The skiff bouncing along behind the power boat that plowed its way up the canyon and across the choppy waters of Lake Mead to the haunts of the big mystery bass



An angler who knows the waters demonstrates the technique of landing the big largemouths



The other volunteer coach, with a chunky largemouth from Lake Mead

Mystery Bass of Boulder Dam

(Continued from page 17)

of the boat. He and Bruce had four more ranging from two to four pounds.

"We let the little ones go," Bruce explained.

"Here's the way to get them," said Sam. "Row along the stream near the coves, troll with spinners or a bass plug of the popping type, or cast with them. If you don't get strikes at once, you'd better move on, because they're pretty leery even though there aren't many fishermen."

Jack cut our skiff loose from the cruiser, and promised to pick us up along toward dark and tow our boat back to the landing.

"We'll hitch hike, too," said Sam. "From the looks of the sky I'm afraid it'll be pretty rough going across the lake."

We hung around a few minutes to see if we could pick up a few pointers from Sam and Bruce. I noticed Sam didn't cast more than twice in one place. He hooked three fish while we watched, and kept one. It weighed about two pounds.

BEFORE we shoved off, I asked Sam if he could explain the mystery of where the bass came from.

"The most plausible theory," he said, "is that, along about 1912, some politician in Utah had a big lot of bass fry thrown in the Virgin River as a vote-getting stunt. Nobody ever saw them after that, and it is believed they ranged downstream. They thrived in the muddy river, but few of them were caught. Perhaps this was because they stayed in Boulder Canyon and such out-of-the-way spots that a fisherman would have had to fly to get to them. And I mean have wings!"

"When Boulder Dam was finished and started to back the Colorado up into the desert canyons and plains, a few of us who used to take catfish from the river wondered if there weren't bass in it. You see, we'd heard rumors of the Virgin River plants. Just for fun, we tried our plugs in the coves of Lake Mead, and, to our surprise, we started to catch bass.

"A few of us who know where to fish have been catching them all winter. That's because Arizona has a year-round open season on bass, and one side of the lake is in Arizona."

We arranged to meet Sam and Bruce at a landmark to await the boat which would tow us back across the lake. Then we set off on our own.

I was at the oars when Charlie got his first strike. He became so excited by the battle that he foolishly horsed the fish in. That bass gave one big splash, and threw the hook.

That was too much for me. The water was calm enough, so I lifted the oars out of the locks and put them in the boat. We could drift safely, and, as we did, I could fish.

A swirl over toward the bank in a cove, among some tree tops almost covered by the rising water, told me that a bass was feeding on the surface. I meant a cast of forty feet, but I tried it. My eagerness resulted in a swell backlash, so Charlie had the honor of landing the first fish.

It was a nice one, too. And, when it pulled down the scale almost to four pounds, I thought Charlie was going to

bite the stem of his pipe in two.

Following Sam's advice, we worked each cove briefly, and then moved on to the next one. I missed three strikes before I finally hooked one, but the fat, sassy bass I landed made up for the misses.

The next three hours passed like three minutes. It seemed as if we'd only started to fish when the big cruiser, with Jack at the wheel, glided through the canyon waters toward us. But into three hours were crammed as much sport as I've had in three days on ordinary bass lakes. We got some fish, too. Not eight-pounders, or six-pounders, but they averaged more than three pounds. And every one a fighter. That cold water was tonic to the bronze-backs.

Farther down the canyon we came upon Sam and Bruce. They tied their boat behind ours and got aboard the cruiser. Once we were on our way back, I realized it had been drizzling rain most of the afternoon. My leather coat was soaked, and my feet were almost numb from the cold. But, in my excitement, I hadn't even known the sun had gone behind the clouds, much less that it had rained.

Now don't get the idea it's a cinch to fish Lake Mead. After trying it, I know it isn't. You've got to be properly equipped, and use an outboard motor on your boat, unless you're a marathon oarsman. You've got to have reasonable skill, patience, and, of course, a little old-fashioned luck. When the lake is rough, use common sense, and stick close to shore if you can't wangle a tow up to the sheltered canyon. Listen to the natives' advice about lures the fish are taking and the spots to fish.

Maybe Lake Mead hit me in a weak moment, when I was unduly susceptible after a long, fishless winter, but it looks to me as if it stands a good chance to become the world's best bass lake. Because the importance of the lake in generating power, irrigating desert land, providing drinking water to millions on the Colorado Aqueduct, and controlling the wild Colorado during flood times, overshadowed the recreational and sport angles, the lake was at first overlooked as a fishing spot, but this unsurpassed reservoir in future years is bound to attract thousands of anglers from all over the country.

Here's a prediction. Ten years from now the biggest largemouth caught in the United States will be from Lake Mead.

What if the bass are temperamental? What bass aren't? You still can look upon a setting so magnificent, so awe-inspiring that it seems almost unreal. In fact, I won't mind too much the next time I fish Lake Mead if the bass go on a strike for a few hours. Maybe I'll have time to enjoy the scenery.

Wolverines Reported

MONTANA park rangers and trappers report that wolverines (*Gulo luscus*) are increasing in the Kishenehu District, in the northwest corner of Glacier National Park, and in adjacent areas in British Columbia. Three were caught, and another observed, during the last two winters. Since these are the first reported since 1916, their appearance has stirred up considerable interest.