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Harry Beal Torrey (1873–1970) of California, USA, and his research on hydroids and other coelenterates

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Abstract

Harry Beal Torrey was born on 22 May 1873 in Boston, Massachusetts. Two years later his family moved to Oakland, California. Torrey earned B.S. and M.S. degrees in zoology from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1895 and 1898 respectively, a Ph.D. in zoology from Columbia University in 1903, and an M.D. from the Medical College of Cornell University in 1927. He began his academic career as a marine biologist, investigating taxonomy, reproduction, morphology, development, regeneration, and behaviour of cnidarians of the west coast of the United States, but his research interests soon shifted to experimental biology and endocrinology. He eventually entered the field of medicine, specializing in public health, and served as a physician and hospital administrator. Torrey held academic positions at the University of California, Berkeley (1895–1912), the Marine Biological Association of San Diego (1903–1912), Reed College (1912–1920), the University of Oregon (1920–1926), and Stanford University (1928–1938). Following retirement from academia, he served as Director of the Children's Hospital of the East Bay, Oakland, California, from 1938 to 1942. In retirement, he continued an association with the University of California at Berkeley, near his home. Of 84 publications by him listed herein, 31 dealt with coelenterates. This paper focuses on his early research on coelenterate biology, and especially his contributions to taxonomy of hydroids. He was author or coauthor of six genera and 48 species-group taxa of Cnidaria, and he also described one new species each of Ctenophora and Phoronida. Although he abandoned systematic work early in his career, his most widely cited publication is a taxonomic monograph on hydroids of the west coast of North America, published in 1902. He died, at age 97, on 9 September 1970.

Key Words: Anthozoa, bibliography, biography, Cnidaria, hydroids, Hydrozoa, marine biology, natural history, taxonomy, zoology

Introduction

Research on hydroids of the Pacific coast of North America commenced in mid-nineteenth century, when four species from the San Francisco Bay area, California, were described by Trask (1857). Subsequent accounts of hydroids from the region prior to 1900 include those of Murray (1860a, b, 1863), A. Agassiz (1865), Clark (1876, 1877), Mereschkowsky (1878), Kirchenpauer (1884), Allman (1885), Fewkes (1889), Marktanner-Turneretscher (1890), Calkins (1899), and Nutting (1899). Yet knowledge of the west coast hydroid fauna remained meagre until early in the twentieth century, when advances were made through investigations of Harry Beal Torrey (1873–1970), Charles Cleveland Nutting (1858–1927), and Charles McLean Fraser (1872–1946).

Biographic accounts of Nutting and Fraser, and their contributions to hydroid taxonomy, have appeared earlier (Schmitt 1948; Arai 1992, 2004; Calder 2004; Calder *et al.* 2009). An overview is given here of the life, varied professional career, and publications of Torrey, an American naturalist and physician whose studies early in his career added materially to knowledge of cnidarians, and especially hydroids, of the west coast of the United States.

Methods

Publications by H.B. Torrey were compiled from citations listed in *Zoological Record* (Vols. 27–110), relevant