

Some People Can't Tell Difference Between Dry Spell And Real Drouth

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MERTZON — Ever since the opening days of this year, the news has been full of reports of the current drouth which is dehydrating Texas crops and grasslands. One newspaper account recently heralded the 105th day without measurable moisture as the driest period in 50 years. All across the state, farmers are wailing long into the night, complaining about dry weather as if it were a new invention, created especially to make them suffer.

Surprisingly, the Shortgrass weather stations are marked by an overall attitude of complacency. Veteran meteorologists don't seem to be one bit excited as they issue their daily reports of temperature changes, throwing in a few partly cloud predictions to round out the program.

The natives out here are displaying the same indifference to the dry weather. Not one out of 10 has so much as rewrinkled the worry lines on his brow as the west winds bring day after day of forage-decimating climate. They never blink an eye while the dust infiltrates the oxygen tanks at hospitals and fogs the air-tight chambers of the local air base's space capsule.

The basic reason for this calmness rests in the devoted belief among the citizens and professional weathermen that a drouth is not a drouth until certain symptoms appear. Experience has taught my people that it is easy to mistake a dry spell for a drouth, and it is very difficult to distinguish between a mere weather pause and an interruption in the rain cycle. Therefore, natives in this land the Indians called "Bankrupt Eve" never panic until the traditional signs begin to appear.

The history of these warning signs can be traced back to the close of the Indian's reign over the Shortgrass County. At that time the greatest student of the omens was a Lipan peacemaker name Curdle Dove.

Curdle Dove, as you may already know, was a famous prophet who assured his tribe that the innate fairness of their white brothers would prevent them from seizing the red man's hunting grounds or killing the buffalo which were the Indian's cattle. However, before he made this last prophesy and left immediately for confinement on a reservation, he completed a lifelong project devoted to pinpointing the initial date of a drouth's arrival.

His theorems departed from the old Indian way of attempting to link the weather with sunspots, variations in ocean currents, or changes in the Arctic ice flows. He cast aside the old superstitions. Instead of using charts and graphs drawn on cave walls, Curdle Dove favored scientific methods to prove his contentions.

In brief, he espoused the following manifestations as certifying true aridity: (1) a blackbird eating the sticks of her own nest; (2) small rodents feasting on the roots of dead fallow weed; (3) the meadow thrush's eventide song being shortened by three-quarters of a stanza; and (4) a blue quail's bark becoming so hoarse it couldn't be distinguished from a ground toad's croak.

Though Curdle Dove fell into disfavor with this people, his system of identifying drouth was passed on to modern times. And today, as the entire state howls and moans about dry weather, the driest of all earthbound creatures, the native Shortgrasser, bides his time until the real drouth arrives. Rains will most likely come before panic develops. There probably won't be any noticeable reaction until it becomes obvious that the first frost of next autumn has killed the chances of any spring rainfall.