

The Zane Grey Game Fish Collection

By FRANCESCA LA MONTE

Assistant in Ichthyology, American Museum

"Lord grant to me to catch a fish
So big that even I
In talking of him to my friends
May never need to lie."

"TO own a beautiful white ship with sails like wings, and to sail into lonely tropic seas"—this was one of Zane Grey's earliest boyhood dreams. How it came true he has told us in his fascinating books of fishing adventures. These are no "fisherman's tales," for in the north end of the Hall of Fishes of the American Museum the visitor may look over many tokens of Mr. Grey's prowess, from the 758 pounds of blue-fin tuna to the huge mass of ocean sunfish, and see for himself the tangible evidence of what the "lonely seas" yielded to this enthusiastic angler. One's first thought is something very like the admiring comment of George Takahashi, a fishing companion of Mr. Grey, as he beheld one of the big catches, "My goodnish graceness! Awful good luck!"

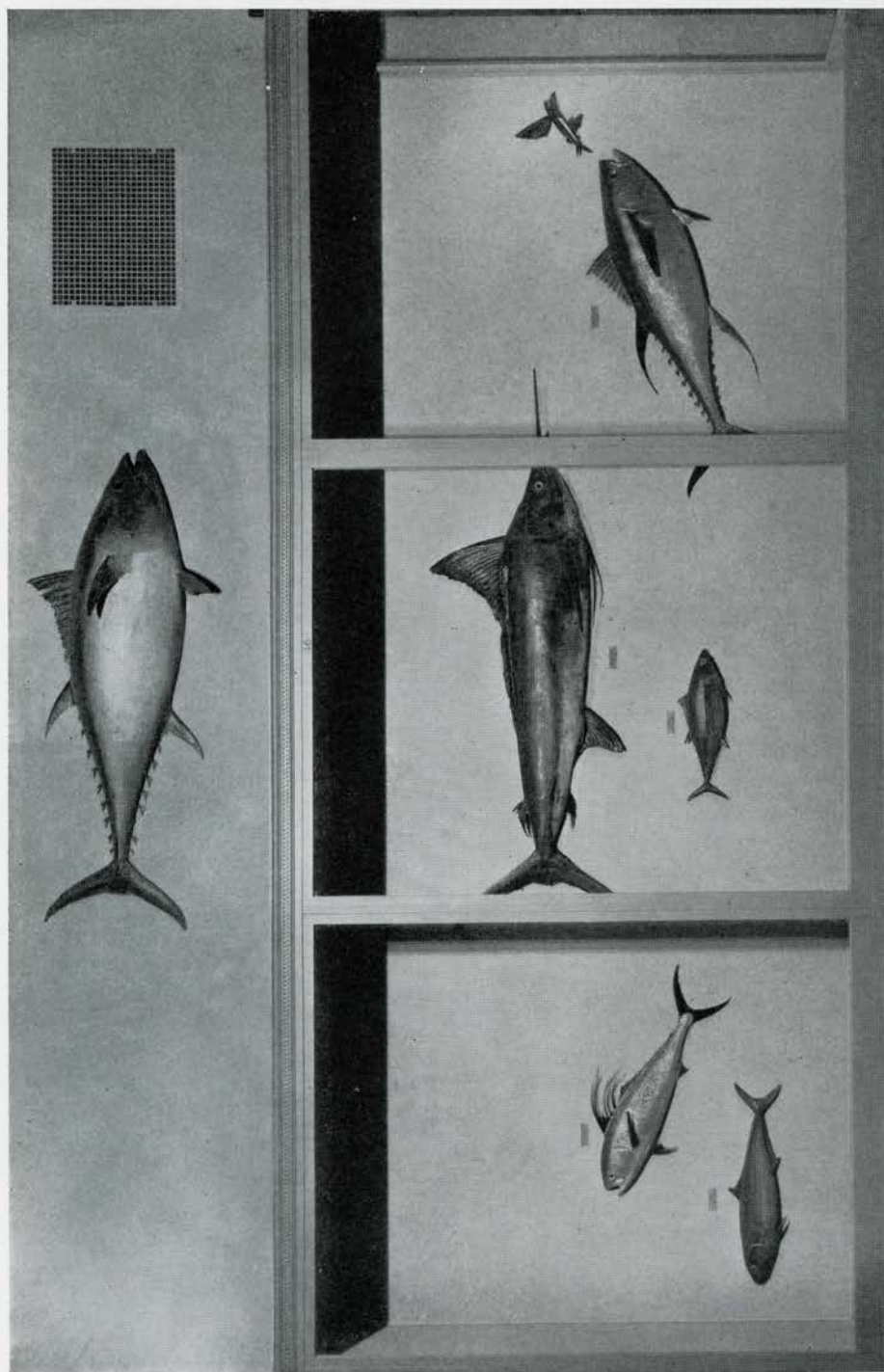
This collection of big game fishes came to the Museum in 1926 as a gift from Mr. Grey, chiefly through the persuasive powers of his friend and our field representative, Van Campen Heilner. Mr. Grey has promised to add to it from time to time some of the trophies of his cruises. As it stands, however, it includes some of the largest, most beautiful, and gamest of fishes. All of them were caught in a sportsman-like way, with "tackle strong enough to subdue the fish, and not to break off a number of hooked fish in an endeavor to catch one on a lighter tackle."

Above the entrance to the proposed Roosevelt Memorial Hall hangs a

Pacific sailfish, the prize of a contest in strength and endurance, won only when this lithe, silvery body with its deep-blue sail was hauled lashing and dripping over the side. One can well imagine that other labels, verbal and less scientific than the present one, "Ocean Sunfish, *Mola mola*," were applied during the process of catching the 2000 pounds of slippery flabbiness now flattening its bulk against the background of the case beneath the sailfish. But trophies like these are worth hot suns, aching muscles, and the bitter disappointment caused by the fisherman's will-o'-the-wisp, that "largest one of all"—that always escapes.

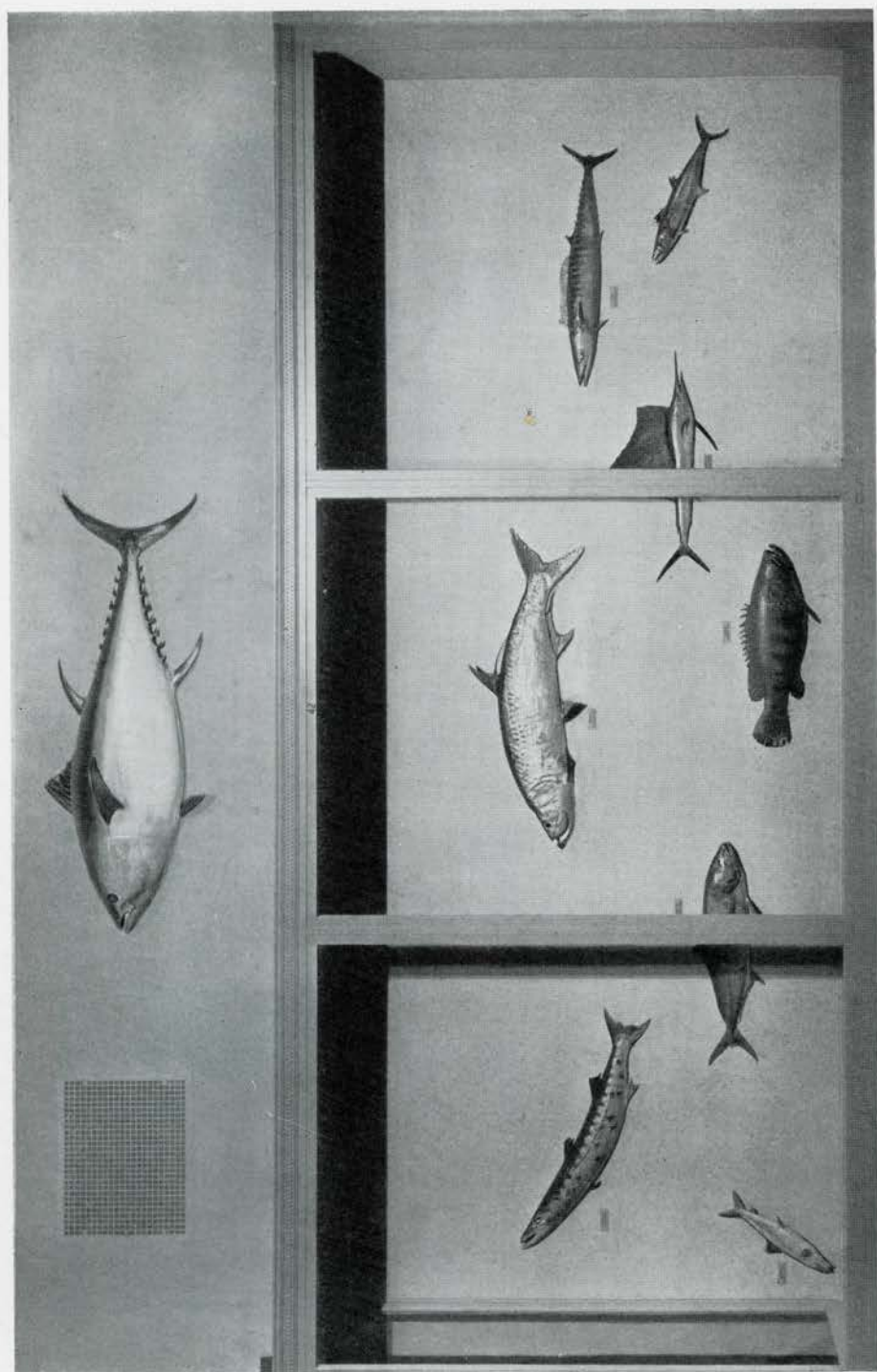
Of course there are some amber-jacks, a tarpon, the fierce pike-like barracuda, a wahoo, and a kingfish. But there are very few things to be taken for granted in this collection, certainly not the seemingly innocent bonefish, standing on its head in a feeding position in one corner of a case,—in reality one of the hardest fighting fishes that swims. Nor does every sportsman's list boast a 582-pound broadbill sword-fish, the world record until replaced in 1927 by a 588½-pound catch of Mr. Grey's brother, R. C. Grey.

The glistening silver and blue bodies of two of the most beautiful fish in the collection stand out against the dark, greenish-black of their case neighbor, the black marlin. These are the spectacular rooster fish or pappagallo,



NORTHWEST WALL CASE OF THE ZANE GREY GAME FISH COLLECTION

Above this case hangs the 758-pound world record tuna caught by Mr. Grey off Port Medway, Nova Scotia, in 1924

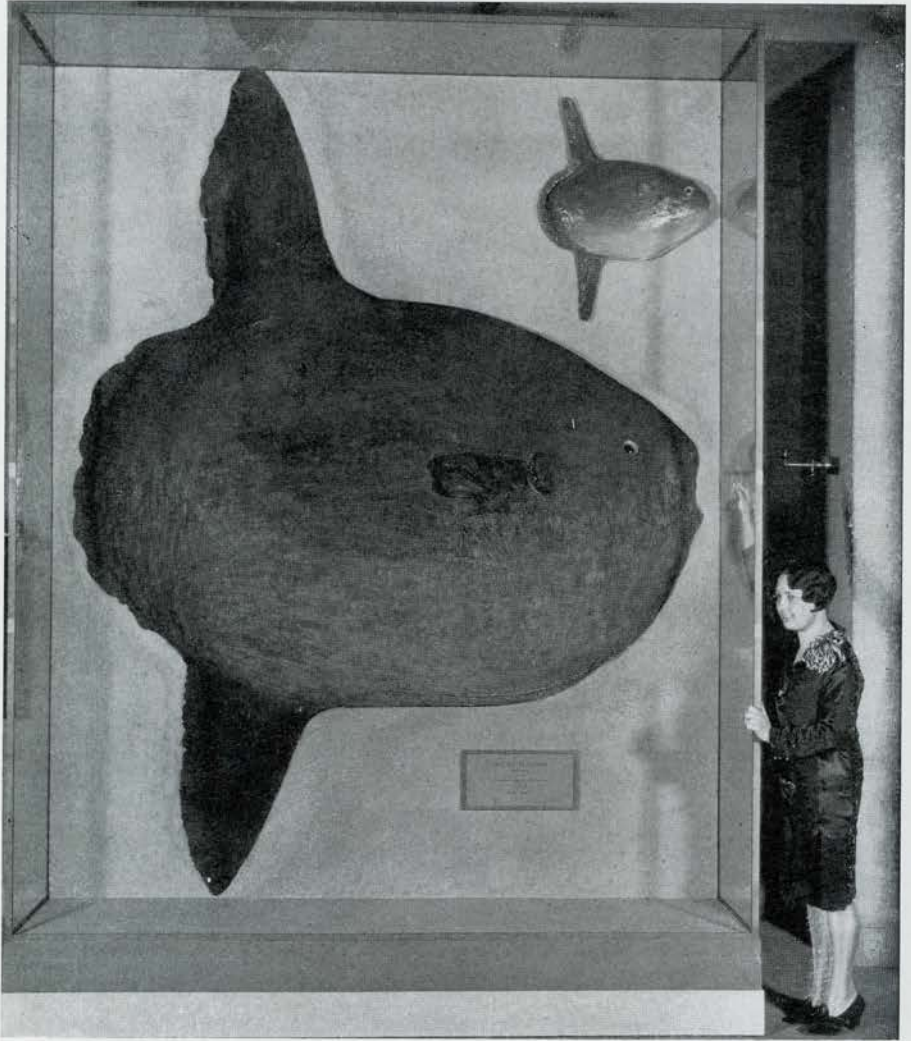


NORTHEAST WALL CASE OF THE ZANE GREY GAME FISH COLLECTION

Particularly noticeable in this case are the bonefish, *Albula vulpes*, and the barracuda, *Sphyraena barracuda*

whose dorsal fin rivals the tail of the proudest rooster, and the yellow fin albacore, *Thunnus macropterus*. Mr.

a depth of 1300 feet. After it was dragged up to the surface, it took three men to haul it into the launch.



Ocean sunfish (*Mola mola*) caught by Mr. Grey. Weight 2000 pounds

Grey describes the capture of this albacore in one of his books. In its surface run at one time, this fish had 400 yards of line out, and before the end of the fight it dove, taking off half the line with the drag on. When the drag was released, the fish went on down and Mr. Grey had to lift it from

But even more exciting is Zane Grey's vivid account of the capture of the record tuna, which he describes in his recent book, *Tales of Swordfish and Tuna*. Inspired by the example of Captain Laurie Mitchell of Liverpool, Nova Scotia, who held the world record at that time, Zane Grey went

to Nova Scotia to fish for tuna, well equipped with what he calls "a mixture of Florida and California methods." His apparatus consisted of two light skiffs, two-oared, sharp fore and aft, and round as a spoon on the bottom; and a launch 25 feet long, 7½ feet beam, light and strong, with two engines and guaranteed to make eighteen miles an hour and turn round in its own length at full speed. All three boats were furnished with special Catalina revolving chairs with rod sockets. His tackle included Coxe reels, Murphy hickory rods, and Ashaway linen lines. For chum and bait the fishing party used native herring.

The capture of this huge tuna did not take place until Mr. Grey and his friends had been in Nova Scotia for some days, and in spite of disappointments and foggy weather, had made several other big catches of tuna. However, on a certain day when, in answer to the signal of a Nova Scotian fisherman, they threw out bait, Mr. Grey felt that something extraordinary was at the end of the line. Unlike the previous rather temperamental tunas, this fish swam deep, evenly, and somewhat heavily. To the dismay of the anglers, it first ran in among the commercial fishermen's nets, but at last swerved and turned toward open water. Its approach to the reefs of Blue Island, at the risk of cutting the line on the jagged rocks; its turnings; its attempts to head inshore, and Mr. Grey's successful efforts to turn it around toward open water: these form one of the most thrilling stories ever told by an angler. Finally, after the boat had alternately pursued the fish and been towed by it, and Mr. Grey's strength was nearly exhausted by the tremendous muscular effort and skill

necessary to keep the tackle from giving under the strain, he succeeded in pulling the fish to the surface and then near enough to lasso and tie it to the stern. The fight had lasted three hours and ten minutes and it took nearly two hours to tow the catch back up the bay to the breakwater. Mr. Grey writes that when the fish was finally hoisted out of the water he could not believe his own eyes. It was even larger than he had anticipated. The native fishermen were amazed to find that the thirty-nine thread line had held and subdued this huge creature 8 feet 8 inches long, 6 feet 4 inches in girth, and weighing 758 pounds.

Perhaps we at the Museum got a faint echo of the breath-taking thrill of these adventures when this great collection arrived and one by one the big packing cases were opened revealing foot after foot of fish, each specimen more startling than the last. And if at times five men struggled to fasten one of the larger fishes to the wall in the Hall of Fishes, what can have been the struggles to capture its resisting, and doubly or triply heavy living body!

The scenes of some of Mr. Grey's cruises, and magnificent views of fish leaping above the surface and fighting on the hook are shown in Mr. Grey's most recent gift to the collection, a series of large colored photographs which will hang on the wall opposite the cases.

Surely many sportsmen and many who are not sportsmen will look at this collection with interest and envy, and recalling that combination of strength, intelligence, fair play, and fun that makes big game fishing a real sport, will heartily agree with Mr. Grey himself that "to catch a fish is not all of fishing."