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NOTES ON A SMALL HERPETOLOGICAL COLLECTION FROM ST. GEORGE, S.W. QUEENSLAND

Part One — Serpentes

BY Wm. HOSMER*

Abstract: A small collection of snakes made in vicinity of St. George, S.W. Queensland is reported upon.

DURING the period from October, 1954, through January, 1956, I was resident at St. George, a small town of 2000 inhabitants on the Balonne River, 328 miles west from Brisbane and 75 miles north from the NSW State border. Collecting was carried out throughout the 15 months, as a result of which 62 species and sub-species of reptiles and amphibians were secured. Though this figure is probably not exhaustive, it gives a reasonable indication of the herpetofauna of a given locality. Such local lists are thought valuable to workers in taxonomy, where distribution is of major importance and because of this, the present list has been compiled.

Because of the small space available in the journal of my choice, it is not possible to treat of all the collection in a single paper, therefore this material is to be presented in three parts—snakes, lizards and frogs, respectively.

Unless otherwise stated, the specimens were collected by the present writer, whose field catalogue numbers are here used.

SYSTEMATIC REPORT — SERPENTES

Typhlops ligatus Peters

Typhlops ligatus Peters, 1879, Mon. Akad. Berlin, p. 775, fig. 3: type locality, Mackay, Queensland.

A single example, No. 395, Myall Plains Station, St. George, Q., collector, H. Lawrence, Feb. 8, 1956. Nasal cleft to first labial; scales in 24 rows. Total length, 340 plus 8 mm.

Typhlops kenti Boulenger

Typhlops kenti Boulenger, 1914, Ann. Mag. Nat. Hist., (8), 11, p. 482: type locality, North Queensland.

Four specimens, Nos. 311, 350, 394, 416, St. George, Q. Nasal cleft to second labial; scales in 18 rows. Total length, largest example, 257 plus 4 mm.

Typhlops australis (Gray)

Anilius australis Gray, 1845, Cat. Liz. Brit. Mus., p. 135: type locality, Western Australia.

A single example, No. 544, St. George, Q. Nasal cleft to second labial; scales in 22 rows. Total length, 309 plus 5 mm. According to Waite (1918), this species occurs in all mainland States, excepting Queensland. This Queensland specimen therefore represents a new State record.

Morelia argus variegata Gray

Morelia variegata Gray, 1842, Zool. Miscell., p. 43: type locality, Port Essington, Northern Territory.

A single example, No. 532, St. George, Q. Midbody scales in 51 rows;

ventrals 291; caudals 81; anal single. Total length, a male, 2193 plus 320 mm. This python was found dead on the bank of the Balonne River.

Aspidites melanocephalus ramsayi Macleay

Aspidiotes ramsayi Macleay, 1882, Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W., 6, p. 813: type locality, Bourke, N.S.W.

Two examples, Nos. 407-8, Katoota Station, via St. George, Q., and six miles south of Yulebah, Q., respectively. Scale-counts of No. 407 only are available. Midbody scales in 60 rows; ventrals 297; caudals 42; anal single. Total length, male, 1848 plus 133 m.m. This fine specimen was found sunning itself by the edge of a bore drain. The Yulebah specimen was found D.O.R. by a mail contractor, Mr. Dowling, and was too decomposed for accurate scale-counting, and the head only was saved. A black mark occurs on each supraocular, and the rostral and internasals are likewise black, merging into yellowish-brown; infralabials, chin and ventrals yellow; body brown, with numerous darker cross-bands.

Ahaetulla punctulata punctulata (Gray)

Leptophis punctulatus Gray, 1827, in King's Voy. Aust., 2, p. 432: type locality, Careening Bay, Northern Territory.

The inclusion of this species rests upon a single specimen, seen by me, laying along a limb of a tree overhanging the waters of the Balonne River.

Furina diadema (Schlegel)

Calamaria diadema Schlegel, 1837, Phys. Serp., 2, p. 32: type locality, Australia.

Two examples, Nos. 315 and 411, St. George, Q. Midbody scales in 15 rows; ventrals 172-4; caudals 41. Total length, largest specimen, 295 plus 57 mm.

Demansia psammophis psammophis (Schlegel)

Elaps psammophis Schlegel, 1837, Phys. Serp., 2, p. 455: type locality, Australia.

Five examples, Nos. 309, 314, 316, 433, 453, St. George, Q. Midbody scales in 15 rows; ventrals 180-188; caudals 72-86; anal divided. Total length, largest specimen, 646 plus 212 mm.

Demansia textilis (Dumeril and Bibron)

Furina textilis Dumeril and Bibron, 1854, Erpet. Gen., 7, p. 1242: type locality, Australia.

Eight examples, Nos. 328, 396, 432, 497, 531, 533, 536, 572, St. George, Q. Midbody scales in 17 rows; ventrals 200-210; caudals 62-69; anal divided. Total length, male, 1195 plus 275 mm. This species is common throughout the greater part of this State.

Demansia nuchalis (Gunther)

Pseudonaja nuchalis Gunther, 1858, Cat. Sn. Brit. Mus., p. 227: type locality, Port Essington, Northern Territory.

Six examples, Nos. 401, 403, 406, 409, 514, 573, St. George, Q. Midbody scales in 17 rows; ventrals 211-217; caudals 48-57; anal divided. Total length, largest example, a male, 1205 plus 188 mm. The color is very variable, but two phases are particularly common. Phase A, creamy-brown or light tan above, the snout, and sometimes also the whole head, shiny black; a few scales on the neck also black. Phase B, dark chocolate brown above, the head and ventral side of throat and anterior scutes black; numerous narrow black, light edged, dorsal cross-bands from the nape to tail, or with fewer broad black cross-bands. This second color form is *carinata* of Longman, which is synonymous with *nuchalis*. *D. nuchalis* is quite distinct from *D. textilis*, and these two species share a common distribution throughout most of the State of Queensland, without intergradation.

Pseudechis australis (Gray)

Naja australis Gray, 1842, Zool. Miscell., p. 55: type locality, Northeast Australia.

Two examples, Nos. 418 and 490, St. George, Q. Midbody scales in 17 rows; ventrals 192-199; caudals 51-61; anal divided. Total length, largest

individual, a male, 1665 plus 317 mm. This is the commonest of the large venomous snakes about St. George, where it is known locally as the red snake.

Denisonia suta (Peters)

Hoplocephalus sutus Peters, 1863, Monatsb. Akad. Wiss. Berlin, p. 234: type locality, Adelaide, South Australia.

Five examples, Nos. 390, 429, 431, 455, 488, St. George, Q. Midbody scales in 19 rows (17 in one aberrant individual); ventrals 155-159; caudals 28-39; anal single. Total length, largest example, a female, 327 plus 43 mm.

Denisonia devisi Waite and Longman

Denisonia maculata var. *devisi* Waite and Longman, 1920, Rec. Sth. Aust. Mus., 1, p. 177, fig.: type locality, Queensland.

Six examples, Nos. 389, 391, 393, 404, 420, 430, St. George, Q. Midbody scales in 17 rows; ventrals 125-132; caudals 27-33; anal single. Total length, largest example, a female, 352 plus 50 mm. Mackay (1956) has done much to clarify the status of *devisi* and *maculata*.

Denisonia gouldii (Gray)

Elaps gouldii Gray, 1841, in Grey's Journ. Exped. Wst. Aust., 2, p. 444, pl. 5, fig. 1: type locality, Western Australia.

Nine examples, Nos. 319, 347, 427, 434, 439, 440, 454, 456, 468, St. George, Q. Midbody scales in 15 rows; ventrals 149-154; caudals 26-32; anal single. Total length, largest example, a female, 342 plus 52 mm. Several specimens show a faint dark vertebral stripe, as in *D. nigrostriata*. Loveridge (1935, p. 228) was dubious in accepting his Dalby example, as the species had not been recorded from Queensland previously. It is, however, a very common species in the south of the State, west of the dividing range.

Hoplocephalus bitorquatus (Jan)

Alecto bitorquata Jan, 1859, Rev. et Mag. Zool., p. 128: type locality, Australia.

Two examples, Nos. 405 and 534, Nindy Gully, 29 miles south from St. George, Q., and Mungindi, 76 miles south from St. George, Q. Midbody scales in 21 rows; ventrals 202; caudals 50-55; anal single. Total length, largest example, a male, 296 plus 53 mm. Several other specimens were taken at St. George, but are not represented in the collection. This species is not uncommon when its habits are known. I have found it to frequent the river courses and creeks, where it hides during the day beneath the loose bark of trees, particularly ironbark or brigalow.

Vermicella annulata (Gray)

Calamaria annulata Gray, 1841, in Grey's Journ. Exped. Wst. Aust., 2, p. 443: type locality, Australia.

Two examples, Nos. 385 and 571, St. George, Q., the latter specimen collected by Mrs. E. Horrigan. Midbody scales in 15 rows; ventrals 224; caudals 20; anal divided. Total length, 375 plus 23 mm. Mrs. Horrigan found the specimen at night on the roadside.

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THE GENUS *PTEROSTYLIS* R. BR. (ORCHIDACEAE) IN NORTH QUEENSLAND

IT IS GENERALLY recognised that the genus *Pterostylis* originated in Australia and those species occurring in New Zealand, New Caledonia and New Guinea are either found in Australia also, or are "local developments from migrants" from Australia. In the southern and western States of Australia, many species occur on the lowlands, although some species found in Tasmania, Victoria, N.S.W. and South Australia are strictly alpine.

All of the species so far found in tropical Queensland (and New

Guinea) have been growing on the highlands, which would appear to bear out the observations in the first paragraph. The two species, *Pt. depauperata* F. M. Bail and *Pt. carinata* Dock, which are peculiar to North Queensland, are very closely related and apparently confined to the Atherton Tableland.

The following is a list of species believed to occur in North Queensland:

1. *Pt. acuminata* R. Br.
2. *Pt. baptistii* Fitzg.
3. *Pt. Carinata* Dock.
4. *Pt. custa* R. Br.
5. *Pt. depauperata* F. M. Bail.
6. *Pt. grandiflora* R. Br.
7. *Pt. ophioglossa* R. Br. (and var. *collina* Rupp).
8. *Pt. rufa* R. Br.
9. *Pt. parviflora* R. Br.

1. *Pt. acuminata* R. Br., Prodr. (1810) 326.

For many years this species has been known to occur in New Caledonia (as well as the southern States of Australia) and about five years ago specimens were forwarded to the Nat. Herb. of N.S.W. from New Guinea. However, it was not until 1957, when W. W. Abell sent specimens from Mt. Spec, that we had a definite record for tropical Queensland.

2. *Pt. baptistii* Fitzg., Aust. Orch. 1: 1 (1875).

This handsome species is relatively common in coastal swamplands in N.S.W. and Southern Queensland, but the author has no definite record from North Queensland, yet a number of unconfirmed reports have been received of its occurrence on the Atherton Tableland. Confirmation of these reports would be of considerable value.

3. *Pt. carinata* Dock, Nth. Qld. Nat. 23: No. 110, 4 (Jan., 1955).

Already mentioned above.

4. *Pt. custa* R. Br., Prodr (1810): 326.

This is a common species in all southern States. Specimens collected near Ravenshoe a number of years ago by the late Dr. Flecker were identified as this species by the late Rev. Ruff. In May, 1955, S. F. St. Cloud collected specimens in the same locality.

5. *Pt. depauperata* F. M. Bail, Bot. Bull. 4 (quoted Bail., Qld. Flor. 5: 1577 (1902).

Already mentioned above.

6. *Pt. grandiflora* R. Br., Prodr. (1810): 327.

The only definite North Queensland record of this beautiful species, common in the southern States, is Mt. Spec, May, 1957, collector Abell.

7. *Pt. ophioglossa* R. Br., Prodr. (1810): 326.

This species is widely distributed from Central N.S.W. to Southern Queensland, usually in extensive, widely separated colonies, and is also found in New Caledonia. As far as is known, the type variety does not occur within the tropics in Queensland, but var. *collina* Rupp, Proc. Linn. Soc., N.S.W., 54: 552 (1929) known only from the Hunter Valley in N.S.W., was recorded many year ago in North Queensland. Specimens received from Abell from Mt. Spec in 1957 were certainly the rich color of var. *collina* but lacked the short dorsal sepal of that variety.

9. *Pt. rufa* R. Br., Prodr. (1810): 327.

Bailey, Qld. Flor. 5: 1577 (1902) states that this species occurs as far north as Rockhampton. No specimens from within the tropics are known to the author. Information of definite records of this or allied species would, again, be of considerable value. They should be looked for in the West as well as on the coast and highlands.

8. *Pt. parviflora* R. Br., Prodr. (1810) 327.

This is a very common species in S.A., Tasmania, Victoria, N.S.W. and is found in Southern Queensland. The only definite record known for the tropics is that collected at Mt. Spec by Abell in 1957.

From the above few observations it can be seen that three southern species were discovered within this region as late as 1957. Undoubtedly

others await discovery. *Pt. recurva* Benth., Fl. Aust. 6: 360 (1873), a Western Australian species, extends to the Northern Territory and it would not be altogether surprising to hear of its occurrence in the north-west of Queensland.

—A. W. DOCKRILL

**BY MAN, FIRE, EROSION, THE HILLS EACH SEASON WITH FORESTS,
ARE BARREN, A SENSELESS REASON.**

NATURE'S SENTINELS

IF THE hills could only speak, what tales they could unfold?
Of a country's first conception, its birth, its growth, so told,
Its pioneers, its settlers, some weak, some stouter breed,
But all of them with one intent, a livelihood their need.
The mountains in their majesty, o'ershadow all sublime
And hills formed into ranges, stand ageless as to time,
Providing growth for tree and shrub, as shelter for the wild
Untrammelled life in nature, remaining undefiled,
With cooling streams encompassed, for bathing and for thirst,
Attracting flighted songsters at the sunray's morning burst.
A panoramic life to view, is the hills' prerogative,
Keeping watch on man's encroachment, to live or not to live:
The battle of man 'gainst nature, o'er many countless years,
Of courage, success, achievement, with heartache wracked with tears.
Nature takes, it also gives, to those with value sense.
Man must work with nature, he should not be so dense
As to disregard the benefits, health, without such ills
As failure, if he co-operates, with wisdom seen by the hills.

—S. DEAN.

MAKING OF A STONE AXE (NAAMBA)

THE rain forest people such as the Tjapukai usually selected a water-worn slate stone for the axe blade, egg-shaped in plan and about one inch thick in the middle and tapering towards the edges. The stone was picked up in a creek bed and the cutting edge was pounded with a hammer stone to flake off unwanted thickness, a groove was pecked around the stone a couple of inches in from the back edge to house the haft. The cutting edge was then ground on a sandstone or granite outcrop or a suitable slab until the edge was sharp.

I have also seen a few axe heads in sandstone. If there was no water-worn stone available a flake of basalt or other hard stone was ground to shape—should no flakes of stone be handy a fire was lit on a rock outcrop and when the rock was hot water was thrown in the fire to flake off a piece of rock.

In some parts the back edge of the axe head was cut away with two right-angled cuts top and bottom and the haft was fitted in the back edge.

The name given to a steel axe was Na-kail; this is the native name for ironstone.

The rain forest people used lawyer cane for the haft and people living in the forest country any handy flexible sapling. Sometimes a straight sapling with two straight close-growing shoots was used for the haft. The axe head was placed in the fork and the shoots tied together near the axe

head and in time the shoots grew together and were cut off below the fork and about fifteen inches along the haft.

Sometimes the haft consisted of a half section of cane looped round the axe head and tied below the head and end of the haft.

The Hjapukai people would select a piece of green-skinned lawyer cane about one inch in diameter and split it down the centre; the parts to go round the axe head were cut to the shape of the groove and one piece was lapped round the head, allowing the end to come down to just below the axehead. The other half was lapped round the opposite side and the ends of the halves turned inward to each other at the end of the haft. A length of thin brown skinned lawyer cane was split and then bound round the haft from below the head to the end. The top laps and turned-in ends were further secured with a mixture of grass tree gum and native beeswax, colored with ground charcoal.

For several years I had been looking for a native to haft a few axe heads for southern museums and myself and finally I found a Tjapukai man named Gwoyken (scrub country) who had learned the craft from his grandfather. This was very unusual as few of the de-tribalised natives ever bother to learn the crafts of the old people.

It took me some time to contact Gwoyken as he was always in a different area to me. Finally, in a visit to the Moona Moona Mission, I was talking to the superintendent when I spotted Gwoyken coming my way. I got into the van and asked the superintendent to call Gwoyken over and when he arrived I asked him into the van—started up the engine and drove off. I told him that he had a job to do for me. He was not very happy about the deal but became happy when I showed him a new knife and a packet of tobacco, tea and sugar, and a promise of each when the job was completed.

We set off for a place along Flaggy Creek where a special green-skinned lawyer was growing. It was quite a trip—we had to plough through long grass eight to nine feet high in the van and as the stumps were becoming too numerous we got out and walked to the scrub.

On the way through the scrub Gwoyken started to forget his mission schooling and used native words to speak to me as we walked along looking for the right lawyer cane. He pointed out numerous edible fruits and plants to me, also some of medicinal value. I was thoroughly enjoying the trip and found myself using a mixture of English-pidgin and native words to speak to Gwoyken.

We got our cane and then had to travel to a different area for the thin yellow-skinned cane for the binding.

As we walked along Gwoyken started to sniff and told me there was a carpet snake about; a bit further on he smelt a brown snake (the natives' sense of smell is remarkable). All I could smell was my old pipe.

We crossed the creek on a fallen log and had walked only a few yards when Gwoyken stood on a snake with his bare feet. He rose up vertically in a mighty hurry calling out jumar, the general name for all snakes, and after I had my laugh I killed the snake.

Gwoyken was a bit nervous after this episode so we hurried up and collected the yellow cane, then back to the van, discussing native plants on the way.

On arrival at the camp we sat down in the shade of a bloodwood and Gwoyken started to split the cane, using teeth and knife. He carefully split the green cane down the centre and shaped the ends to fit round the groove in the axe head. The thin yellow cane was then split down the centre. The halves of green cane were then lapped round opposite sides of the axe head, the bottom ends turned inwards to each other and then the haft was bound with the split yellow cane from the bottom of the axe head to the turned-in ends.

As I watched him work I became conscious of a quietly growing semi-circle of natives squatting behind us. No word was spoken by the visitors until I had turned and greeted them and passed round the tobacco

pouch. I told them of Gwoyken walking on the jumah. This caused a great laugh and put everyone in a good mood.

Gwoyken worked steadily on, enjoying the mild sensation he was creating as it was the first time most of the young people had seen an axe halted.

I heard a sound of chopping in the distance and shortly after two old ladies, Jool-bg and Wanga-day, approached with their hands behind their backs. They stood in front of us until I greeted them and asked them to sit down. They then produced two gunda (digging sticks) they had hurriedly made and presented them to me.

It had always been my custom to call the old people and give them a gift of tobacco, tea and sugar, etc., as payment for information on tribal lore and in my hurry to get Gwoyken on the job I had missed my usual visit. As I had not called on them they thought they were going to miss out on the rations, hence the gift of gundas.

The axe halfting was now nearing a finish and as I talked to the old girls a young lad asked me if it took me long to learn the Tjapukai language. He said he had tried to learn Tjapukai but could not manage the words. This greatly amused the gallery at our rear and the lad had to put up with a lot of chaffing.

I do not speak Tjapukai fluently. I have learnt only sufficient to understand the old people when they spoke of tribal lore as there are no English words for some of their words. A white man is called a meecoola in Tjapukai and this term is also used for a native who does not know the tribal tongue.

This finished a very pleasant day for me. I had two neatly halted axes and Gwoyken was happy with his pay. The people in general had enjoyed the wongli.

Boongua the sun was going to camp behind the Boonda so I left for home.

—DOUG SEATON

HOPLOCEPHALUS BITORQUATUS

ONE of our very few tree-climbing poisonous snakes which has no common vernacular name but is known by the technical name of *Hoplocephalus bitorquatus* is one of our snakes of which very little is known. This being one of the broad-headed snakes, other members of the same genus include *Hoplocephalus bungaroides* and *Hoplocephalus stephensi*, all of these have keeled ventral scales which, like the Green Tree Snake (*Ahaetulla punctulus*) indicate tree climbers. This snake, having fangs and poison glands, is poisonous but not considered deadly owing to its small length which is not in excess of two feet, but a bite should be treated with caution and first aid treatment should be administered.

COLOURATION: The colour of this snake is slatey black above with white and black patches each three to four scales wide on the nape of the neck, the top of the head having black markings on a light brownish white background. Each labial scale is also black and white. The ventral and sub-caudal scales are also slatey black on the mid-ventral line.

SCALATION: The ventral scales are keeled each side and number from 197 to 200, the sub-caudals number from 44 to 60, all being single, and the anal scale is single also. Body scales in the thickest part of the body number 21, supra labials number six and infra labials number five. The head is distinct from the neck.

DENTITION: This species has fangs approximately 2 mm. in length

with an inter-fang measurement of approximately 6 mm. This depends, of course, on the length of the type specimen.

LOCALITY: Two specimens in the author's possession came from Irvinebank and Ravenshoe on the Atherton Tableland, North Queensland. Other specimens have been recorded from time to time along the coastal areas of Queensland and New South Wales.

—VINCENT M. REILLY

CLUB ACTIVITIES

THE activities of the Club for this quarter have been very extensive, with the various members being active in their own sphere.

Librarian, Mr. E. Fielder, through dint of perseverance, is getting our exchange list back on to a very good footing.

Mr. Fielder has been going through the old lists of exchange and contacting those clubs and institutions which, for some reason or other, have stopped posting their publications and journals, and the results, so far, are proving very gratifying.

The specialised articles which make up the reading matter of these publications is of much value to the members in their different spheres of interest and this is where I want our country members to realise that this same material is at their disposal in just the same way as it is to the town members.

It does not matter what subject of natural history you are interested in, you have only to drop a line to Mr. Fielder and I am sure you will find him most helpful and pleased to forward whatever articles we have on that subject to you. I just want to point out, though, don't keep those articles too long before returning them, as other members are constantly asking for information and what they are wanting might just as easily be in the literature you have, so just make your notes and reference and post them back. There also could be some of our town members who could and would be pleased to help out with advice from some of their store of knowledge on that subject.

Whilst on the subject of articles, I want every member to realise that this journal is constantly crying out for original articles on any subject of natural history for publication. At the last Council meeting of the Club it was decided that the author of each article published will receive six copies of that journal, but should the authors require more, a letter to Mr. Fielder will be sufficient to have that wish attended to.

Since our last publication, membership of the club has continued to increase steadily, and the particular interests of the new members embrace many fields of activity.

Many interesting talks and slide evenings have been held in conjunction with the usual monthly meetings, at which good attendances have been maintained.

The Club meets at the Kuranda Barracks on the second Tuesday of each month. Postal address: Box 199, Cairns.