

## THE SNAKES OF BANGKOK.

By

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### 14. *Dryocalamus davisonii*.

*Hydrophobus davisonii*. Blgr. Faun. Ind., Rept.

I have seen two specimens of this slender and very handsome snake, both from Sapatoom. One of them was found climbing up the wall of Dr. Frankfurter's house, and the other was killed in an adjoining garden.

Dr. Frankfurter's specimen, caught in July, contained 4 eggs, without signs of any embryo. They were narrow and of great length. One, shrunk by spirit, measured  $19 \times 7$  mm.

*Color* (in life). White, with large elongated black spots, each one extending over the back and on to the sides. Posteriorly these spots become much smaller and are broken up.

*Length*. 700 mm.

*Distribution*. Tenasserim, Siam and Indo-China.

### 15. \* *Zamenis mucosus*. *The Common Rat Snake*.

*Siamese*, งูเห่าคตาน (*ngu hao talān*).

A fairly common snake and may be found almost anywhere; frequenting the padi-fields, the compounds in close proximity to the town, and occasionally entering go-downs and out-houses. It may be seen moving about at all hours of the day, and is, I believe, chiefly diurnal in its habits.

Amongst those who have but a slight knowledge of snakes, this species, and less often the succeeding one, are not infrequently confounded with the Cobra. There is some justification for this

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\* Major Wall, in the last number of the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*, brings forward strong evidence to show that this snake should in future be placed in the genus *Zaocys*.



mistake, as the characteristic feature of the Cobra, its hood, is by no means always apparent, whilst in point of size and in general coloration, there is a considerable superficial resemblance between them.

After the python, the Common Rat Snake grows to a greater size than any other species found here, frequently attaining a length of seven or eight feet. The largest specimen that I have seen was killed one afternoon on the lawn of the Sports Club, where it had taken up its position beneath a chair, in broad daylight and with people about. It measured 2110 mm. (6.11 in.), and had just eaten three large toads, a fact which probably accounted for its incautious behaviour on this occasion. Another has been recorded (*Journ. B. N. H. S.*) measuring 11.6 in., but such a length is quite unusual.

In disposition I have found it a wild and excitable creature, seeking refuge in rapid flight when encountered, but defending itself vigorously if attacked. Although named the Rat Snake, its diet consists chiefly of frogs and toads. It is one of the few snakes which is eaten by the country people.

*Color* (in life). Above, from light or dark olive-brown to olive-green, with well defined but irregular black cross-bars on the posterior half of the body and tail. The young have, in addition, a series of light, dark-edged bars across the anterior part of the body. These disappear with age and after adult life are confined to the interstitial skin. Below, pale yellowish, the posterior ventral and sub-caudal shields edged with black. Labials yellow, edged with black.

*Distribution.* From India to S. China and the Malay Archipelago.

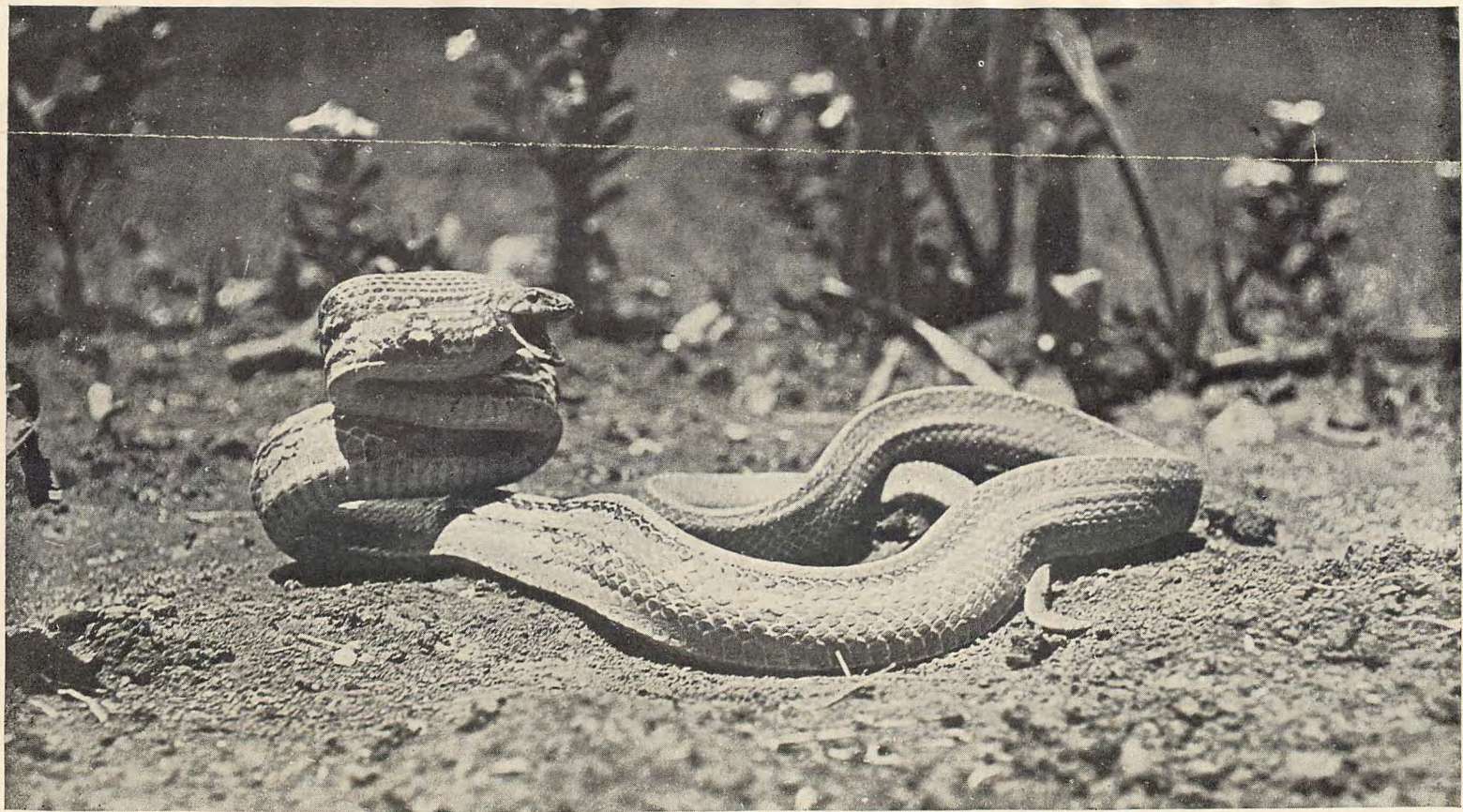
#### 16. *Zamenis korros*.

*Siamese*, งูเห่าคาน (ngu hao talān).

It is strange that Flower did not meet with this snake in Bangkok and only records two specimens from the country during his stay. I have found it quite as common as the preceding species, but not so universally distributed, confining itself chiefly to the patches of open brush-wood about the edges of the padi-fields. It has strong arboreal tendencies and is far more often to be seen coiled on a branch in some high bush, than on the ground. At the "Ditches" it is quite common, where it keeps company with *Psammodon condanarus* (already described), and on one particular afternoon, after heavy rain, I caught







*Coluber radiatus.*



or saw no less than twelve in about an hour. Where these two species live during the dry months I have not yet been able to discover, but they disappear from this haunt after November and do not reappear until the rains have again set in.

Length, 2000 mm. (Boulenger), but I have never seen any specimen from Bangkok of such dimensions. A very large skin in my possession, however, which I think may be undoubtedly referred to this species, was recently killed by Mr. Keddie in the valley of the Meklong. It measured in life, 8 ft. (2440 mm.). The dried skin (of which a considerable portion of the tail is missing) measures 2260 mm.

*Color* (in life). Above, olive-brown, olive-green or olive-grey, the scales on the posterior part of the body and tail, edged and tipped with black. Below, rich yellow in the anterior part, fading to pale yellowish or whitish behind.

*Distribution*. From the E. Himalayas to S. China and the Malay Archipelago.

#### 17. *Coluber radiatus*.

*Siamese*, งูหนังตะพวด (ngu t̄ang maprao).

"Tang maprao," meaning the mid-rib of the coconut palm leaf, refers to the broad black bands which this snake bears upon its sides. The name, however, is not confined to this species, but may be used to designate any species that has a conspicuous lateral stripe.

It is not a common snake in Bangkok, although it is more plentiful in the country districts outside. It prefers the open country or the plantations and gardens adjacent thereto, although in search of food it will enter human habitations. Its habits and disposition are much like those of the Common Rat Snake.

This snake possesses in a marked degree the power of expanding, in a vertical direction, its throat and the anterior part of its body. The point is well brought out in the photograph, which shows also the menacing attitude adopted by this creature when cornered, with the fore-part of its body thrown into a series of loops and the mouth widely agape, ready to dash at anything. Under these conditions it is extremely handsome, the jet black bars with which it is marked at this part showing up vividly against the pale fawn of the rest of the body. The illustration shown is of a fine specimen which was caught crossing



the road one morning at Samsen. It never grew accustomed to being handled, and the photograph was taken after it had been four months in captivity, when it was nearly as wild and fierce as on the day it was captured. Young ones I have kept were more gentle and soon became tame.

The largest specimen I know of measured 1710 mm. but was incomplete. The tail was 300 mm. long, and the lost tip would probably have added another 30 mm. to it.

*Color (in life).* Above, yellowish-brown, fawn or fawn-grey, with a distinct reddish tinge posteriorly. Along each side of the fore-part of the body are three black stripes, the upper, broad and conspicuous, the second, half the width and shorter, the third, very thin and much broken up, or occasionally absent altogether. Below, yellowish white in front, pale pearly grey behind. Subcaudals, whitish. A black line across the occiput and three more radiating from the eye.

*Distribution.* From the E. Himalayas to S. China and the Malay Archipelago.

### 18. *Dendrophis pictus*. *The Painted Tree Snake.*

A fairly common snake, and widely distributed everywhere, frequenting the open brush-wood in the fields, the betel-nut and fruit gardens, and the compounds in the very heart of the town; loving the sunshine and on the move at all hours of the day. In dull weather it is much less active. It is thoroughly arboreal in its habits, and although it may be seen upon the ground, it is, I believe, only when in search of food. The speed at which it can travel when disturbed is amazing, and is almost lightning-like in its rapidity.

Curiously enough, for a creature of such marked arboreal tendencies, its diet appears to consist entirely of frogs, not only tree-frogs, which are comparatively rare, but the common frogs of the padi-fields. I have never found anything else in the stomachs of specimens I have examined, and those I have kept in captivity lived entirely upon this diet, refusing all other kinds of food. The commonest field frog here is *Rana limnocaris*, and these constitute their main diet, but they are by no means particular. *Oxyglossis lima* they refused, but there must be something very distasteful about this little frog, for I have never known any snake to eat it.

Although the Painted Tree Snake is not vicious or prone to bite in captivity, its shy disposition never seems to leave it, and it always resents being handled. That it has the power of springing or planing from one tree to another, a habit which has given rise to the stories of flying snakes, has been well established.

*Length.* 1200 mm., the tail forming from  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the total measurement.

*Color* (in life). Above, bronze-brown. A creamy yellow stripe runs down each flank to the vent, bordered below by a black one of equal width which passes along the costo-ventral junction, and usually by a narrower one above in its posterior two-thirds. Below pearly white. Head with a black band passing through the eye on to the neck. Upper labials white. Tongue pinkish. The interstitial skin of this snake is very handsome, and shows up strongly when the creature, under excitement, dilates its body. Upon the neck and anterior part of the body it is pale blue, behind, pale green.

*Distribution.* From India to Indo-China and the Malay Archipelago.

#### 19. *Simotes cyclurus*.

*Siamese.* งูเห่าปี่แก้ว (ngu hao pi kaa-o.)

A fairly common and widely distributed species. It is nocturnal in its habits, but may be found by day hiding itself away in dark nooks and crannies in all sorts of situations.

This snake is credited by the Siamese with giving utterance to that peculiar, high-pitched, drawn-out whistling note, which is heard so frequently by Bangkok residents after dark. Its Siamese title of "pi kaa-o", meaning literally "a crystal flute", is given to it in recognition of this call, and is very appropriate. I have kept no records, but believe it can be heard during any month in the year, although it is most frequent during the hot, dry weather. I have often endeavoured to discover the author of this sound, but have so far been unsuccessful, although I have strong reasons for thinking it is some kind of bat. Mr. Gairdner, on the other hand, tells me he feels sure it is a species of cricket. The point upon which we both agree is that it is not caused by this snake, or indeed any snake at all, although the idea that it is so is widely believed throughout the country.



*Simotes cyclurus* is a sluggish snake, and if encountered, as it may be, in the early morning or at dusk, will often make no attempt to move out of the way. In disposition, however, it is fierce and vicious, and captivity does not improve its temper.

*Length.* 700 mm. (Boulenger, *Fauna Malay Peninsula*, and *Cat. Snakes, Brit. Museum*). I have seen many specimens longer than this, the biggest one measuring 865 mm. The largest I know of from Bangkok measured 790 mm.

*Color.* Very variable, but the changes in Bangkok specimens are largely due to age, the markings in old ones being very indistinct and often broken up. The *Catalogue* gives six varieties of this snake, none of which quite accord with the one that is found here.

Above, light brown, with a series of narrow, ill-defined, black cross-bars, every fourth one of which has a large dark brown, black-edged dorsal spot or blotch, of which there are from 11-16 on the body and 3-4 on the tail. The coloring of the cross-bars is confined chiefly to the edges of the scales, and the dorsal spots are variable in shape, but are usually mesially indented. Below, pearly white, uniform. Head with markings as in the illustration. Sometimes a handsome pink color tinges the flanks and belly.

This description applies to Bangkok specimens only, and although variations from it will be met with in other parts of the country, it will be found sufficient to identify the snake all over Siam.

*Distribution.* From E. India and S. China to the Malay Archipelago.

## 20. *Simotes tæniatus*.

*Siamese.* งูจิ้งจอก (ngu ngort).

Quite as common as the preceding and found in similar situations. It is less aggressive in disposition. By the Siamese it is accounted particularly venomous, but apart from its lack of poison apparatus, its small size renders it incapable of inflicting anything more than a scratch. It feeds chiefly upon small frogs.

*Color* (in life). Above, light brown with 4 dark brown longitudinal lines running down the body. The two median, border the vertebral row of scales and are continued to the tip of the tail, the two lateral, end at the vent. These lines are more or less strongly punctuated with black dots; in the young more so than in the

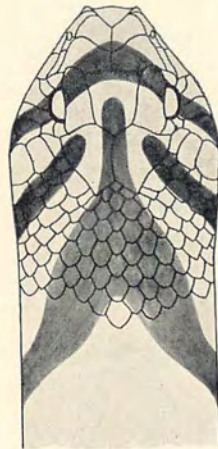




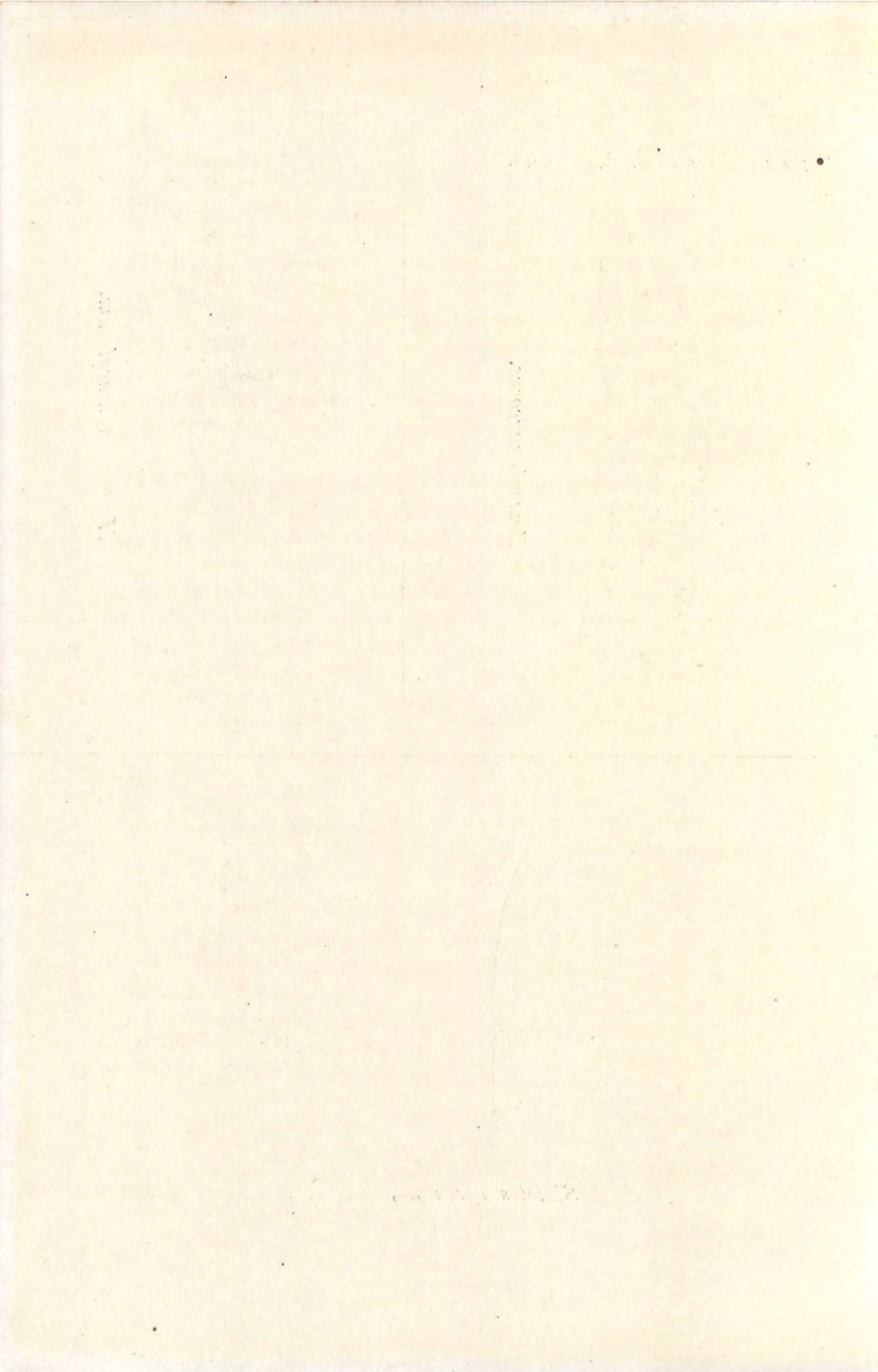
*Zamenis mucosus.*



*Herpeton tentaculatum.*



Head of *Simotes cyclurus*, showing the characteristic Family markings.





adult. Below, bright coral-red upon a white ground, and with rectangular black spots laterally placed. They are most thickly distributed on the posterior part of the body, but vary considerably in number and may be almost entirely absent. Head with the characteristic family markings, but differing slightly from *S. cyclurus* (*vide* illustration). Interstitial skin over the vertebral region, light yellow.

*Length.* The largest specimen I have seen measured 475 mm. in length, the tail forming 60 mm. This, however, is an unusual length, and specimens over 400 mm. are rare.

Another distinct form of this snake exists in Bangkok, to which Mr. Boulenger has now accorded the title of *Mouhoti*, in memory of the famous French naturalist and traveller who discovered it. It is most easily distinguished from the preceding one by the presence of two black splotches upon the tail above, one at the base and another near the tip. For the full differential diagnosis of these two, the reader is referred to page 70 of this *Journal*.

*Distribution.* Siam and Indo-China.

### Subfamily HOMALOPSINÆ.—The Fresh-water Snakes.

*Siamese,* งูปลาน (ngu pla).

Bangkok, as might be expected from its low-lying position, is rich in fresh-water snakes. Out of some 15 species now known from this region (Burma and Indo-China to the Malay Peninsula), no less than 9 have been found here. They are not all strictly confined to fresh water localities, some of them being found along the sea coast, although never far from the mouths of rivers. Fresh-water snakes (the term is used as opposed to sea-snakes) in Bangkok are mostly in evidence at the end of the rains and during the early floods of the dry weather. The whole country at this time being more or less covered with water, they are able to make their way into the multitude of small ponds and ditches from which at other times of the year they are cut off. During the dry months they retire to the river and main canals and are much less often met with. The majority are of a sluggish disposition and are easily caught. On land their movements are clumsy. As far as is known at present, all of them are viviparous.

21. *Hypsirhina enhydris*,

A common snake in Bangkok, and with the exception of *Homalopsis buccata*, the most plentiful of the whole family found here. It may be met with in almost any of the water-ways which intersect the country, usually lying quietly among the weeds, with its snout projecting from the surface of the water. It is not strictly aquatic, and after stormy nights, in particular, may often be seen on land. It is never, however, found far from water. It is a very gentle snake, and I have never yet known one attempt to bite when handled.

It appears to subsist chiefly on fish, but Mr. Herbert informs me that he once caught one which disgorged a skink (*Mabuia*), a very unusual meal, I should think, for this snake.

*Length.* 680 mm.

*Color* (in life). Above, olive-brown, olive-grey or olive-green, with two or three more or less distinct light longitudinal bands. The last 3 rows of costal scales are alternately lemon-yellow, pale pinkish, and again yellow. Below, pale yellowish, with a black line along each side of the ventrals, and usually a thin median one, formed by a series of dots. The handsome coloring of the last 3 costal rows of scales is, I believe, peculiar to Siam, and, sometimes, Burma.

*Distribution.* From India and S. China to the Malay Archipelago.

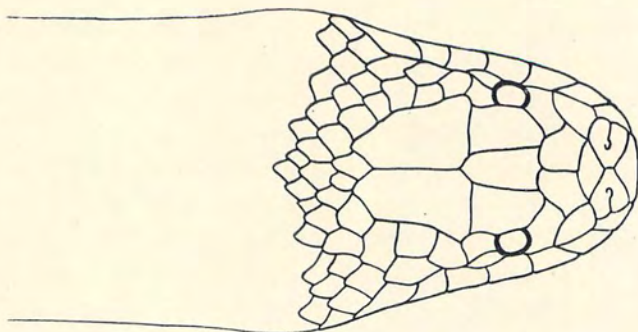
22. *Hypsirhina bocourti*.

A rare snake in Bangkok, but more plentiful in the country districts round about. In the fields by Ayuthia and also at Ban Hua Takhé, it is not uncommon, and as the country and the canals dry up with the advance of the hot weather, and its places of habitat become limited, it can almost invariably be met with.

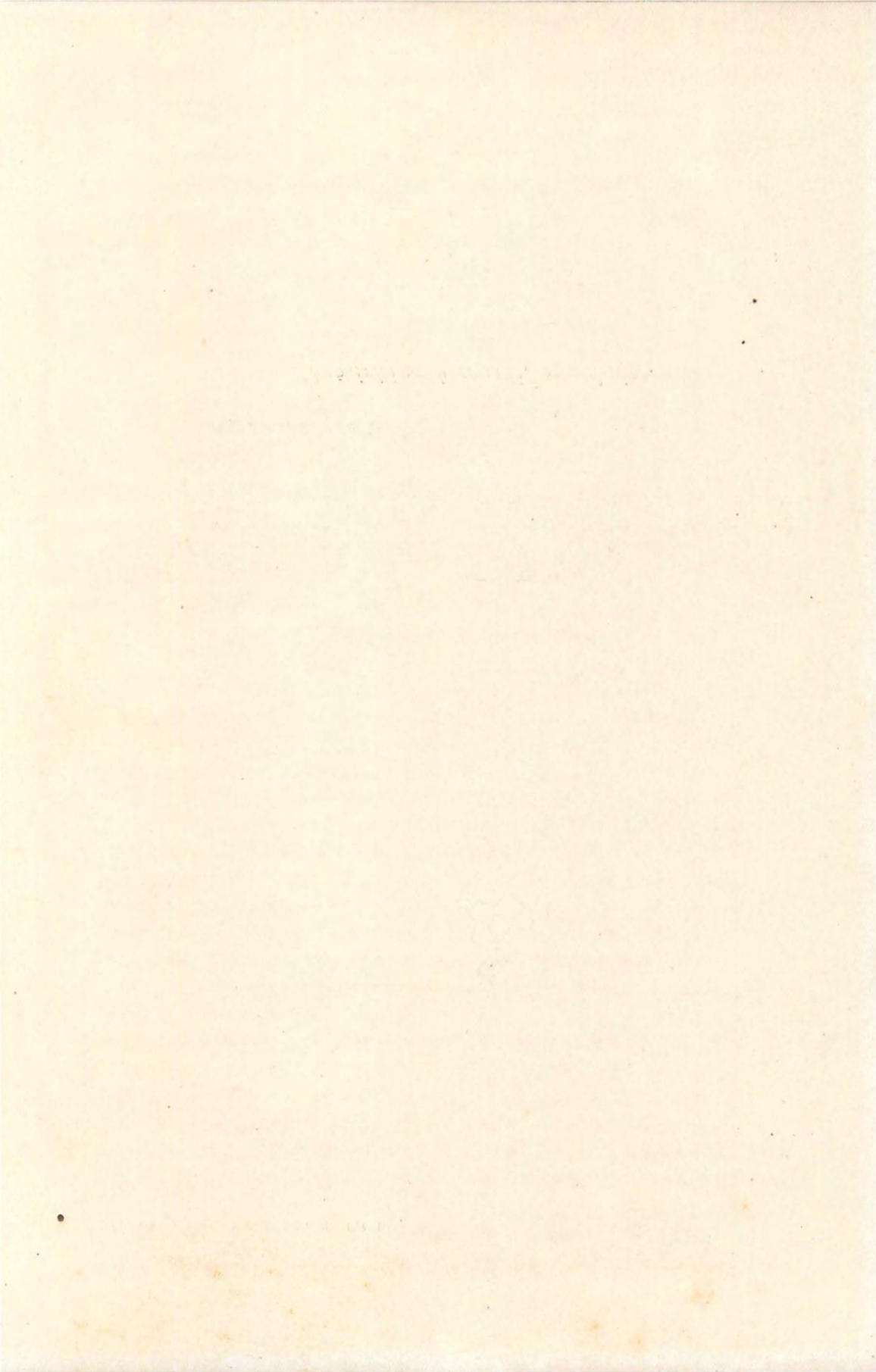
Like *H. enhydris* it is not strictly aquatic in its habits. Its temper is uncertain, and it is not a snake to handle carelessly, although if lifted quietly it will usually make no attempt to bite. Those I have kept fed freely upon frogs.

This snake, for its length, has great girth, particularly in adult life, while the sinister expression upon its face, together with the thick, bloated appearance of its body, combine to make it the most ungraceful and repulsive looking snake that I know of.





*Hypsirhina bocourti*, natural size.





*Length.* Up to 1120 mm. The tail is short, measuring about one-seventh of the total length.

*Color* (in life). Above, very dark olive-green, sometimes almost black, with regular cross-bars formed by chains of yellow or brown spots, and less well-defined longitudinal lines produced by a median spot in each scale. The dark ground-color tapers on the sides into a series of transverse bars, which are prolonged to the mid-line on the belly, but are continuous beneath the tail. The notches thus formed are deep yellow in color, the ventrals, pale yellowish or whitish. Head brown, labials and chin-shields yellow, the scales edged with black.

This description applies to the young and young adults, but as age advances the dorsal bars and lines tend to increase in size and obscure the ground color, so that in old specimens the pattern is seldom apparent.

The drawing of the head is by Mr. C. L. Groundwater, to whom I am also indebted for all the other drawings in connection with this article.

*Distribution.* Siam, Indo-China and the Malay Peninsula.

23. *Hypsirhina iagorii*,

Flower, in his list, mentions three specimens of this snake which he obtained in Bangkok.

*Distribution.* Siam and Indo-China.

24. *Hypsirhina smithii*.

This snake, of which only one specimen has so far been obtained, is described for the first time on page 69 of this *Journal*.

25. *Hypsirhina chinensis*.

Boulenger, in his *Catalogue of Snakes*, mentions a specimen from Bangkok which is in the Christiania Museum.

*Distribution.* Siam, Indo-China and China.

26. *Homalopsis buccata*.

The commonest of all the family of fresh water snakes in Bangkok, and as regards length, the largest. It is frequently met with

by those working in the saw-mills, owing to its fondness for sheltering in the large holes that are found in the interior of teak logs. Here, where it can lie undisturbed, half-submerged, and in almost complete darkness, it no doubt finds an ideal retreat during the hours of daylight. In captivity it quickly becomes tame. Its food consists of frogs and fish. Flower credits it with more intelligence than most snakes and writes that the ones he kept could distinguish him from strangers. A female in my possession recently gave birth (Aug. 7th) to 9 young ones. They were extremely lively and strongly resented my handling them. They were born in the water and were thoroughly at home in it, but the mother sought the land as soon as her operations were completed.

*Length.* The largest specimen I have seen was a female, which measured 1310 mm., the tail forming 275 mm. Length of the young just born, taken from the above brood, 325-360 mm.

*Color (in life).* Above, dark brown or plum-colored, the color ending abruptly on the sides, and with pale, yellowish, dark-edged cross-bars, alternately complete and incomplete. Sides yellow, fading to pale yellowish or white upon the ventrals, which have a series of black dots, placed laterally. Under surface of tail thickly covered with black. Head brown, with ill-defined markings, the most pronounced being a pale wing-shaped mark on the occiput, a dark V on the snout and a dark band passing backwards from in front of the eye.

In the young the ground color above is quite black, and the markings are white and clearly defined. In the old ones they become indistinct and may be almost absent, so that the dorsum presents an almost uniform brown color.

*Distribution.* From Burma and Indo-China to the Malay Archipelago.

## 27. *Cerberus rhynchops*.

I know of a single specimen which was caught at Samrae. It is an inhabitant of river mouths and the adjoining sea coasts. I have also examined specimens from the sea coast at Bangtaphan and from the Inland Sea at Singgora. I do not know of any other records of this snake from Siam.

*Distribution.* From India and Indo-China to the Malay Archipelago.



28. *Hipistes hydrinus*.

Boulenger's *Catalogue of Snakes* mentions a specimen from Bangkok.

*Distribution.* Mouths of rivers and coasts of Pegu, Siam and the Malay Peninsula.

29. *Herpeton tentaculatum*. *The Tentacle Snake*.

Siamese, งู หัว ค้าง (ngu kra-dāng).

This curious looking snake, although not common in Bangkok itself, is more numerous in some of the water-ways in the neighbourhood. At Bang-pa-in it is not uncommon, and also at Petriu, and probably many other places, but being strictly aquatic in its habits, is not often met with unless carefully hunted for. The strange antennae-like appendages which protrude from the snout, serve to distinguish it at once from all other snakes. Speaking of these appendages Flower states: "In life the tentacles of the snout are soft, capable of expansion and retraction, and apparently very sensitive; the snake constantly moves them about, as if they performed the function of the antennae of Arthropods.....When the specimen is placed in spirits the tentacles retract and are not so conspicuous as in life."

I am unable to agree with this at all, and as Flower was a most careful observer, I cannot help thinking that, as he wrote his article after he had left the country, he must, in this case, have been relying on his memory. I have often kept these snakes in captivity and have paid much attention to the "tentacles," and Major Sprater, who has also kept them, entirely agrees with me.

The rostral appendages (as they are technically termed) of this snake are not soft, but are covered with hard scales akin to those upon the other parts of the body. In the process of sloughing they are thrown off as a complete cast with the rest of the skin. They are not capable of expansion and retraction, although they have a wide range of movement as regards approximation and divergation. When the snake lies beneath the water, they are pointed in a forward direction; with the snout protruding above the surface, a common position for this snake to assume, they are laid flat back on either side against the upper lips. They are seldom moved, but are generally allowed to flop

about in an inert manner, more like useless appendages than organs with any function. They are not sensitive, and may be examined freely without any resentment on the part of their owner. Their use is still unknown. The photograph of the head shows them very well.

I have never known this snake to bite when handled, or make any attempt to escape. It feeds, I believe, entirely upon fish. Its Siamese name, "ngu kradāng", is given to it on account of the stiff, unbending attitude which it assumes when caught. I have been informed by a high authority in the language that the word "kradang" cannot properly be used in this sense; it is, however, the explanation commonly given by the country people, though one would certainly have expected, knowing their aptitude for picking out salient features, that they would have chosen the "tentacles" on this occasion.

*Length.* 770 mm.

*Color* (in life). Above, reddish brown, with a dark, irregular, longitudinal stripe on either side of the vertebral line, and a broader lateral one commencing at the nose and passing through the eye. Below, pale yellowish, with very similar stripes, the two median of which border the ventral scales. Anteriorly, some dark dorsal cross-bars, and a series of white, dark-edged, ventral spots.

*Distribution.* Siam and Indo-China.

( To be concluded ).

