

## MISCELLANEOUS NOTES.

## No. I. A Bangkok Python.

In April 1920 when driving home one night after dinner I saw a python (*Python reticulatus*) by the side of the road in Newman's Mile near the entrance to the Sports Club. I stopped the car and caught it, and as I was leaving for England two days later took it with me and presented it to the Zoological Society of London. At the time of capture the snake was about ten feet long and presumably two years old. She—the sex was discovered later—refused all food until the following October, and her first meal in captivity was taken on October 15th, just six months after being caught. There is nothing unusual in such a long fast. Most pythons refuse food during the first month of captivity, and one in the Gardens in London at the present time has not had a meal for nine months and does not seem much the worse for it. After that first meal she fed well and regularly and grew to be about 18 or 20 feet long. She was one of the few pythons that have bred in captivity, and between 1930 and 1934 bred three times. The last clutch of eggs, 33 in number, were laid in August 1934, and the young hatched out in October. Seven of them are still alive.

In May 1937 she died, and had therefore lived 19 years. Major Stanley Flower<sup>1)</sup>, in a recent paper on the "The Duration of life in Animals" states that "a python that lives for 15 years in captivity has done well. Definite records of over 15 years are very rare, although 20 and 21 years have been recorded."

The rate of growth of the Reticulated Python is not known, but there is no reason to think that it does not proceed as in other snakes, in spite of the great length to which this snake attains. Observations made in recent years have shown that sexual maturity in snakes is usually attained by the end of the third year, and full length by the end of the fifth or sixth year. After that the girth may continue to increase, but very little is added to the length. A newly born Reticulated Python measures between two and two and a half feet in length; a fully grown individual about 20 or 22 feet. Specimens that have reached 20 and 30 feet or more have been recorded, but they are exceptional. The young of my python measured under two feet in length when born and their rate of growth has been very variable. They are now 18 months old; the largest measures 6 ft. 6 inches in length; none of the others are more than 5 ft. 6 inches. Captive individuals however, seldom grow as rapidly as those living under natural conditions.

Pythons were not uncommon in Bangkok when I lived there. I could usually reckon on catching one or two every year, in a large clump of bamboos that hung over the pond in my compound, when

1) Scientific Adviser to the Museum in Bangkok, 1896-1898.

I lived at the bottom of the Suriwongse Road. Only youngsters came there, up to 12 or 13 feet in length. There was usually no difficulty in catching them as the python is inclined to remain on its ground rather than escape when discovered; and it was good sport. There is no venom in their bite, but they have a fine set of teeth and can inflict nasty wounds.

There are many ways of tackling big snakes but the following method is as simple as any of them. I have never seen it adopted by anyone else, and pass it on now for those who would like to try it. Take a bath towel and wrap it several times round the left hand so as to protect it completely. Push this into the snake's face. It will be at once seized and before the creature can free its teeth for a second bite it can be gripped round the neck and carried off. The rest of the snake's body will get wound round yours in the process, but the constricting power of a Reticulated Python that is not more than 12 or 13 feet in length is not great. It is as well however to have someone at hand to seize the tail and unwind in case a coil gets round your neck. There was no bath towel handy when I met the python in Newman's Mile, so I threw my coat over it and then sat on top while I felt for its head.

London, June 20th, 1937.

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## No. II. Breeding Habits of the Indian Cobra.

In the Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London for 1931, Mr. George Jennison published a note on the breeding habits of a pair of cobras in the Belle Vue Gardens, Manchester. In the two succeeding years they again bred, and confirmation of the "nesting" habit and further information concerning gestation and incubation were gained. In 1934 they unfortunately died and it will be of interest now to summarize the whole story. The procedure on each occasion was watched by Mr. James Craythorne, who had charge of the snakes, under the guidance of Mr. Jennison, at that time Director of the Gardens, and every care has been taken to record the facts accurately.

The snakes arrived at Belle Vue in 1928 and were then apparently adult. Sexual maturity in the cobra is reached at the age of three, and full growth in about a year or two later; the snakes therefore when they arrived must have been at least three years old. The records of the three years breeding are as follows:—

### 1931

Date of copulation not known. Eighteen eggs were laid on March 8th or perhaps earlier. Seven young were born, the first being seen on May 12th.