

## THE REPTILES OF HAMPSHIRE, AND THE ISLE OF WIGHT.

BY REV. J. E. KELSALL.

As might be expected from its mild climate, and its southerly position, Hampshire is comparatively rich in reptiles, claiming every British species but one.

The species are few, and fall into such convenient groups for reckoning, that every naturalist ought to be able to remember them without trouble, as follows:—

### BRITISH REPTILES.

Three Groups of three	}	Three Snakes	Common Snake Adder or Viper Smooth Snake
		Three Lizards	Slow-worm Common Lizard Sand Lizard
		Three Newts	Warty Newt Smooth Newt Palmate Newt
Two Groups of two	}	Two Frogs	Common Frog Edible Frog
		Two Toads	Common Toad Natterjack

Of these thirteen, the only one absent from Hampshire is the Edible Frog, a native of East Anglia. In speaking of our Reptiles *en masse*, I should like to remind Hampshire naturalists of the significance of the occurrence of the rarer species, in the words of the late Canon Kingsley. He says, "I have only time to point out to you a few curious facts with regard to reptiles, which should be specially interesting to a Hampshire bio-geologist. You know, of course, that in Ireland there are no reptiles, save the little common lizard, and a few frogs (also toads and newts). And you

will of course guess that the reason of the absence of reptiles is, that Ireland was parted off from England, before the creatures, which certainly spread from Southern and warmer climates, had time to get there. You know of course that we have a few reptiles in England. But you may not be aware that as soon as you cross the Channel, you find many more species of reptiles than here, as well as those which you find here."

He then goes on to mention three rare Hampshire reptiles, which I will take in their proper order, below, saying, "Here again, we have cases of animals, which have just been able to get hither before the severance of England and France, and, not being reinforced from the rear, have been forced to stop in small and probably decreasing colonies, on the spots nearest the coast which were fit for them."<sup>1</sup>

I now proceed to mention our Hampshire reptiles one by one.

1 THE COMMON OR RINGED SNAKE (*Tropidonotus natrix*).

Universally distributed, but said to be less common in the Isle of Wight than the Viper,

The Common Snake, which is harmless, always has a *white or yellow mark* on each side of its neck, sometimes making quite a collar, the rest of its body being dull green or grey. It is generally found near water, and can swim well, and sometimes devours fish, but feeds chiefly upon frogs. It has no poison, but defends itself by giving out a strong and disagreeable smell when in danger. There is no reason for destroying these interesting creatures; they do no harm, and help to preserve us from the danger of a plague of frogs.

The following remark of Gilbert White is as true now as when it was written, June, 1768;—"Country people talk much of a water-snake, but, I am pretty sure, without any reason; for the Common Snake delights much to sport in the water." This snake lays eggs and deposits them in a dung-hill or some such place.

2 THE ADDER OR VIPER (*Pelias Berus*).

Universally distributed, including the Isle of Wight but most common on light soils.

As it is important to know an Adder when you see it, I may say that its unfailing mark is the *unbroken zigzag line* which runs all down its back, generally black, sometimes brown. Our other snakes have no such line. The ground colour is extremely variable, either brown, or red, or grey, or almost blue, or almost white. The country people declare that the red viper is a different species, and the line down its

<sup>1</sup> Scientific Lectures and Essays, Rev. C. Kingsley, page 170. For this reference I am indebted to my friend the Rev. J. Vaughan, vicar of Porchester.

back is not black but brown, yet perfectly distinct. The proportion of red vipers in the Forest is said to be about one in ten. An excellent observer in the Island, the late Rev. C. A. Bury, who said that he often counted seven or eight adders in one walk, in spring, believed that vipers are always red when young, and had never seen a young one that did not answer the description of the so-called Red Viper.

Another variety of the Viper is almost black, the line only showing in certain lights, so that it is a safe rule to avoid black snakes when you meet them.

Black Vipers have been found in the Forest and the Isle of Wight; thanks to the kindness of Mr. Charles Evans, of Christchurch, I have seen a Forest specimen taken during the past summer.

I need hardly say that the poison is contained in two hollow teeth or fangs, not in the tongue or the tail! There is little danger of being bitten by an Adder, as it always glides rapidly away from an approaching footstep, and persons have scarcely ever been known to die from the bite unless they were already in an unhealthy condition. In the case of a bite, the circulation in the wounded limb should be immediately stopped by binding it tightly with a handkerchief, strap, or cord, *above* the place, that is, nearer the body; and oil or ammonia or any soft fat should be rubbed into the wound, or the place may be sucked, and the poison spat out, if there is no sore place on the mouth. These instructions are given in Miss Hopley's book on British Reptiles.

The Forest people use the Adder's own fat as a cure, and tell me that "Adders is fattest in March month," which shows how early they come out of hibernation.

It must be rather exciting to come upon a bunch of them underground in winter. We read in Davenport Adams' "Isle of Wight" of "near a bushel" being found at Alverstone, and seventeen heads being counted after the discharge of a gun into the heap. I trust that the ladies of the Field Club, who shudder at the idea of a bushel of adders, will plead with their sporting friends for the protection of the beautiful New Forest hawk, Montagu's Harrier, which loves the flavour of viper's fat better than the plumpest rabbit.

I have no space to deal with the great controversy as to whether Vipers swallow their young. I fully believe that they do. I can say exactly what Gilbert White said in 1768, that "several intelligent folks assure me" that they have seen it. Among them are the Rev. G. M. A. Hewett, M.A., Assistant Master of Winchester College, and Mr. Charles Crouch, jun., a respectable parishioner of my own. Brusher Mills, the well-known adder catcher of Lyndhurst, declares he has often seen it. Miss Hopley, authoress of the little work I have quoted, and a well-known student of Reptile life, fully believes it to be true, and remarks that the habit is known to exist among various lizards and fishes. Some persons are, however, incredulous, and Mr. Tegetmeyer, of the "Field" Newspaper, offers £5 for a specimen with its young in its stomach.

Among those who have studied snakes in Hampshire, I must mention Frank Buckland, who caused some consternation in one of the Winchester Class rooms, when he entered "brandishing a bottle of ammonia and proclaiming that his Viper had got loose."

The Viper lives principally upon mice and young birds, and brings forth its young alive, whence its name (*vivi-par*).

### 3. THE SMOOTH SNAKE (*Coronella austriaca*).

Locally distributed; found in the New Forest and in the North East of the County; absent from the Island.

This is the most rare and the most interesting of our Hampshire Reptiles. It was unknown in Great Britain until 1859, when Lord Arthur Russell sent a specimen to the British Museum, which had been captured near the flagstaff at Bournemouth. Shortly afterwards Mr. Frederick Bond wrote to the "Zoologist" saying that he had taken another specimen of the "new British snake" near Ringwood five or six years before, the exact spot being near the St. Leonard's Inn, just within the Hampshire border. Since then many specimens have been taken in the Forest. Frank Buckland kept one as a pet, and described it in the "Field" (October, 1862), as sitting coiled up on his table, with its six little ones nestled together on its back.

A beauty was caught in my own garden on July 6th, 1894, and my friend Mr. G. B. Corbin of Ringwood, reported one from his neighbourhood during last August.

This snake is one of the three reptiles to which Charles Kingsley called attention, saying that it had been found in North Hants and South Berks fifteen or twenty times, including three specimens from Eversley. He thought it would most probably be found in Wolmer Forest. One was taken in August, 1883, on the hills between Yateley and Camberley, on the borders of Hants and Surrey, as recorded in the Report of the South London Entomological Society.

Those who are lucky enough to find this species, will know it best by the absence of the features that mark the two other species, namely, a black line down the back, and a white or yellow collar on the neck. Its usual colour is a silvery grey, and it lives upon lizards and slow-worms, and brings forth its young alive. So far as I know, it has never been found North of the Thames, nor further West than Dorsetshire; a specimen reported years ago from Scotland<sup>1</sup> turns out to be an American species.

### 4 THE SLOW-WORM OR BLIND-WORM (*Anguis fragilis*).

Universally distributed, including the Island.

This common reptile is well known to all country people. Though resembling a snake, it is really a Lizard, with rudimentary limbs beneath its skin. It is quite harmless, and indeed useful, living chiefly on slugs. It brings forth living young.<sup>1</sup>

The Rev. H. M. Wilkinson, Vicar of Milford, informs me that when living at Bisterne he once heard a disturbance amongst his poultry, and found that it was caused by a Slow-worm, which had the tail of a young one hanging from its mouth. On killing it he found several others in its stomach.

### 5 THE COMMON LIZARD (*Lacerta vivipara*).

Universally distributed, including the island.

This is the common little brown scaly lizard, found upon all our dry banks and heaths. The Forest people call it the Furze Evtet, to distinguish it from the Water Evtets or Newts. The Natural History books call it the Scaly Lizard, or the Viviparous Lizard, because it does not lay eggs. When you try to catch it in the heather, it will sometimes run up the outside of your sleeve, and I have more than once carried one a long way clinging on to my coat or sitting on my shoulder.

<sup>1</sup> Zoologist 1894.

## 6 THE SAND LIZARD (*Lacerta agilis*).

Locally distributed; apparently confined to the Bournemouth and New Forest heaths.

This is one of the rarer species referred to by Kingsley, who wrote of it as "found on Bourne-heath, and, I suspect, in the South Hampshire moors also." He probably counted Bourne-heath as belonging to Dorset. I have caught specimens at Bournemouth, but not yet in my own parish.

The Sand Lizard is not always easily recognised; but if you see a green Lizard, you may be sure it is this rarer kind. It is sometimes brown, but is larger than the common sort when full grown, and has three rows of spots down its back, each with a white centre. This Lizard lays eggs, and is supposed to be the species referred to by Gilbert White as the "beautiful green *Lacerti*" which he saw on the sunny sand-banks near Farnham. The Green Lizard of Guernsey, is not admitted as British.

All our Lizards are beautiful, useful, harmless, and interesting; in fact there are only two poisonous lizards known in the world, and they live in Mexico.

## 7 THE WARTY NEWT (*Molge cristata*).

Universally distributed, including the Island, but not so common as the next species.

Our remaining species, Newts, Frogs, and Toads, differ from Snakes and Lizards in many important features, especially in passing through the tadpole stage. Those naturalists who separate them from the Reptiles give them the name of *Amphibia*.

The Warty Newt is the big black eft with a rough skin like that of a toad, generally about 5 or 6 inches long, and bright orange yellow underneath. The best time to study Newts, is from April to June, when they go into water to lay their eggs, and the males wear fine crests. The eggs of all our species are rolled up separately in the leaves of water-plants.

The Warty Newt, like the Toad, secretes in its skin an acrid juice, as a protection against carnivorous foes; when in the grip of an enemy it wriggles violently and shews its yellow stomach, and all carnivorous creatures know that black and yellow is the sign of a disagreeable taste, or poisonous sting.

## 8 THE COMMON SMOOTH NEWT (*Molge vulgaris*).

Universally distributed, including the Island.

This common "Evvet" is easily distinguished from the last by its much smaller size and smooth skin. Its habits and metamorphoses are similar, and it is frequently devoured by its large relation.

## 9 THE PALMATE SMOOTH NEWT (*Molge Palmata*).

Found in most parts of the county, including the Island.

This is generally considered a rare species, but I have found it at Fareham, both in clay-pits and chalk-pits, and also at Bournemouth, and in the New Forest. In Venable's Guide to the Isle of Wight, the late Mr. A. G. More described it as nearly as common there as the last species, and Ryde and Brading are mentioned as localities in Professor Bell's "British Reptiles."

In the excellent edition of White's Selborne, edited by Professor Bell, he mentions having discovered this newt in the pond on Selborne Common. It has been found in scattered localities, including Ireland and Sutherland, but seems to be absent from the midland counties of England. In the Spring, the male of this Newt may be easily recognized by the little thread which protrudes from the tip of its tail, and by its hinder feet, which are completely webbed; it is rather smaller than the last species, and not so decidedly crested.

It is now agreed by the best authorities, such as Mr. G. A. Boulenger, F.L.S., of the British Museum, that the other Newts described by Professor Bell, are either not distinct species, or not really British.

#### 10 THE COMMON FROG (*Rana temporaria*).

Universally distributed, including the Island.

As there still exist people who cannot distinguish the Frog from the Toad, I ought to mention that the former has a smooth skin, while the latter is covered with warts. The Frog, of course, can leap well, and never progresses in any other way, except when climbing or swimming, but the Toad crawls deliberately, and his leaps are but poor attempts. My researches in Natural History have led me to the conclusion that there are some people who call a Frog a Toad when they wish to be particularly correct, just as they say "commence" for "begin."

An interesting fact about the Frog, is its power of gradually changing its colour, like the Chameleon, to suit its surroundings. This was pointed out to me a few years ago by a friend, since dead, and I see that it is mentioned in the works on British Reptiles, with more or less detail, and also in Professor Miall's "Object Lessons."

A correspondent of the Selborne Society's journal "Nature Notes," lately asked an explanation of the fact that several Frogs which she had seen attacked by various animals, and yelping in great terror, were all of a yellow colour. I suppose that all Frogs turn yellow under those circumstances. I have not space to dwell further upon these phenomena, but they deserve the attention of our young naturalists.

I have already mentioned that the Edible Frog (*Rana esculenta*) is the only British Reptile not native to this county, but I read in "The Southampton Times" that Mr. Cotton of The Mount, Bishopstoke, turned some out in the Itchen Valley about two years ago. They would be recognized by their loud and resonant croak.

#### 11 THE COMMON TOAD (*Bufo vulgaris*).

Universally distributed, including the Island.

It is to be hoped that members of the Field Club will use what opportunities they have to protect this unfortunate creature (and indeed, all our harmless reptiles) from persecution. Its only poison is the acrid fluid before mentioned, which is contained in glands in the skin, behind the eyes, and along the sides, and this appears not to be venomous in the ordinary sense, though sometimes strong enough to kill a bird or snake which has swallowed the whole reptile. When a Toad is tamed it will, after a few days, freely permit handling, without using even this protest.

The eggs of the Toad are laid in long strings, not in masses like those of the Frog. Both are useful inhabitants of a garden or greenhouse, on account of their fondness for insect food, but the Toad will also devour young snakes with relish.

## 12 THE NATTERJACK TOAD (*Bufo calamita*).

Locally distributed in the North-East and South-West of the County.

This interesting species, which may be described as a running Toad, with a *yellow stripe* down its back, is one of those mentioned by Kingsley, who wrote of it as common at Eversley.

Professor Bell writes as follows in his Edition of White's Selborne (1877):—"Some years ago the Natterjack was by far the most common species of Toad in my garden (White's house at Selborne); but for some years past, not one has been seen. Its voice was far more powerful and resonant than that of any of its congeners, and could be heard at a great distance, resembling almost deceptively that of the Nightjar; it was, however, only heard during the breeding season. . . I have seen hundreds of young ones not larger than a finger-nail, on the heath at Wolmer not far from the pond, where doubtless they had been bred."

The Rev. J. Vaughan tells me that he has found this species at Kingsley, near Alton, and on Short Heath Common. I have not yet discovered it in the New Forest, but Mr. E. Hart, F.Z.S., of Christchurch, has met with it on Hengistbury Head. In the "Zoologist" of 1848, it mentioned that this species has been introduced into the Isle of Wight, but it can hardly be native there, or it would not have escaped the notice of the many naturalists who have lived there.

I ought to mention that two species of Turtle are included among British Reptiles by some writers, but they are only very rare and accidental wanderers to our coasts, not habitual residents in our seas.

Gilbert White has comparatively few remarks on Reptiles, being, as Bell observes, somewhat prejudiced against the whole tribe. I should like to recommend to those who wish to follow up the subject:—Professor Bell's "British Reptiles" (Gurney and Jackson, 12/-); M. C. Cooke's "British Reptiles" (W. H. Allen); Catherine Hopley's "British Reptiles" (Swan Sonnenschein, 1/-).

I will only add that I shall always be glad to hear of the occurrence of our rarer Reptiles, or any new observations on their habits. It is hoped that a book about our Hampshire Vertebrate Animals will someday be written, and it is desirable to collect all material possible,

ADDENDA TO A LIST OF BIRDS OF HAMPSHIRE  
AND THE ISLE OF WIGHT.

BY THE REV. J. E. KELSALL, M.A.

*H.F.C. Papers, Vol. I, Part IV, Page 90.*

In the Proceedings of the Hants Field Club for 1890, I printed a List of the Birds known to have occurred in the county in a wild state, and I am glad to say that the lapse of time has not revealed any serious errors in it, except that the locality where the Fieldfare is supposed to have nested, is not our Alresford, but Alresford in Essex.

The number of species in the List above referred to, was two hundred and eighty-one, and I take this opportunity of adding a few Accidental Visitors which have been discovered in a wild state, or in collections, since the publication of my first list.

- ✓ 282 WATER PIPIT (*Anthus spipoletta*).  
The Isle of Wight specimen in the late Mr. F. Bond's collection belongs to this species (Rev. H. A. Macpherson).
- ✓ 283 LAPLAND BUNTING (*Calcarius lapponicus*).  
One, Christchurch, March, 1891; another near the same place, October, 1894 (E. Hart, F.Z.S.).
- ✓ 284 SNOWY OWL (*Nyctea scandiaca*). } Mr. Hart's collection contains  
✓ 285 SCOPS OWL (*Scops giu*). } Hampshire specimens of all  
✓ 286 EAGLE OWL (*Bubo ignavus*). } these birds. It was through a  
mis-understanding that I reported the Scops as introduced.
- ✓ 287 RUDDY SHELDRAKE (*Tadorna casarca*).  
One, Burley, near Ringwood, March, 1892 (Col. Esdaile).
- ✓ 288 RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus hyperboreus*).  
Two, Ringwood, October, 1890 (G. B. Corbin).
- ✓ 289 SABINE'S GULL (*Xema Sabinii*).  
One, Keyhaven, October, 1891 (E. Hart), one, Bournemouth, same month (F. Coburn), one, Christchurch, September, 1896 (E. Hart).
- ✓ 290 YELLOW-BILLED DIVER (*Colymbus Adamsi*).  
One, Emsworth Harbour, winter, 1895-6 (Rev. S. G. Scott).
- ✓ 291 LESSER GREY SHRIKE (*Lanius minor*).  
One, Heron Court, near Christchurch, September, 1842, in Lord Malmesbury's collection (Rev. M. A. Matthew, in "Zoologist," 1894).