

VIRGINIA HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

THIRD STATEWIDE MEETING and election of the 1961-1962 Society officers will be held in the Spring of 1961. The site has not yet been selected and the date will depend upon the availability of the site. Read future bulletins for word on the progress of arrangements.

All bulletins hereafter will cover two months, except in high activity periods such as months when a major Society meeting is scheduled. Members are to be commended for their patience this summer and fall. A number of factors have combined to make regular (and timely) publication difficult. SEE: "Coming in future bulletins" on an inner page.

We will endeavor to carry out the program described in VHS-B No. 17. The program is not unambitious, but our sights are trimmed more accurately to the conditions and the targets as the result of readers' comments. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

SECOND ANNUAL TRIP TO THE NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL PARK -- More than a score of Virginia, D.C., and Maryland members of the VHS enjoyed the annual trip to the National Zoo on Saturday, September 17, 1960. Our host and hostess were Mr. and Mrs. J. Lear Grimmer, both recently returned from a collecting trip to British Guiana. NZP Associate Director Grimmer, a herpetologist and VHS member, filled in for the absent sound track on some fine color-film footage of a melanistic Gila Monster (Heloderma sp.) and the hatching of cobra eggs, among other interesting film shorts.

During the tour of the Reptile House, led by Senior Keeper M. (Jack) DePrato, VHS member, those present eyed similar newly-hatched and active cobras -- live close-up. Many fine specimens were seen.

NOTE: (Through the courtesy of the National Zoological Park's Director, Dr. Theodore H. Reed, and Associate Director J. Lear Grimmer, one afternoon a year is set aside especially for the VHS meeting and guided tour of the Reptile House. We hope more members will make this annual event. We see this meeting as the fore-runner of future joint meetings of the Virginia Herpetological Society and a hoped-for sister society in Maryland. Such may exist in embryo form -- the Maryland and D.C. members of VHS and our non-member friends throughout the State of Maryland.)

We, the officers and members of the VHS, wish to thank the NZP, its Director, Dr. Reed, and his associate, Lear Grimmer and the able NZP staff at the Reptile House, led by Jack DePrato for an enjoyable and highly educational session. Thanks, too, to William A. Xanten, Jr. and a cast of about 600 specimens. We'll never forget the "feeding the Monitor lizard sequence" -- a single event well worth the trip!

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SPECIAL HISTORICAL FEATURE

"CURATOR DETAILS FIFTEEN-HOUR ORDEAL"

(At the suggestion of

W. Leslie Burger, Virginia Herpetological Society President, College Faculty Member and Instructor in Biology, we are reprinting, for the benefit of all members and friends, an account of the death -- from snake-bite -- of world-renowned herpetologist Dr. Karl P. Schmidt, as recounted in the newspapers at the time. This story combines the tragic, but instructive accounts written by Chicago Tribune reporter Thomas Buck, Lincoln Park Zoo Director R. Marlin Perkins, and Dr. Karl P. Schmidt's own diary of the events leading up to his death on September 26, 1957.)

"A boomslang with undivided anal plate --- a 30-inch snake brought for identification to Chicago Natural History Museum by an aide of Marlin Perkins) proved to be uncommonly difficult to name. It was known to be an African snake and with the characteristic head shape, oblique and keeled dorsal scales and bright color pattern, should have offered no difficulty. But no key for identification would make it a boomslang, for the anal plate was undivided.

"That it was nevertheless a boomslang was dramatically attested by its behavior. Mr. Perkins' aide; Dr. R.F. Inger, Museum Curator of Reptiles; Hyman Marx assistant in the Division of Reptiles, and I were discussing the possibility of its being a boomslang when I took it from Mr. Inger without thinking of any precautions and it promptly bit me on the fleshy lateral aspect of the first joint of the left thumb. The mouth was widely opened and the bite was made with the rear fangs only; only the right fang entering to its full length of about 3 millimeters. Only one other tooth mark from the penultimate tooth appeared on the thumb when the snake was disengaged. The punctures bled freely and I sucked them vigorously, but did not think of..

..

Thus opens the diary in the perfect penmanship of the old school, on several sheets of ruled notepaper, and covering a 15-hour period from the time Dr. Schmidt boarded a suburban train at 4:30 p.m. on the day he was bitten until the next morning. Associates say he believed he had recovered and was planning to return to work. His associates said Dr. Schmidt, then 67 years old and curator emeritus of zoology at the Natural History Museum, made the record with no foreboding that it would be climaxed by death. He and others at the examination felt that he had not gotten a lethal dose from the bite. In fact, his associates suggested that he make the record of symptoms that might develop. "He would have done this himself, anyway," said an associate, "for herpetologists never miss an opportunity to record a case history." "We believed the bite to be minor and without danger. It was from a young snake that had been in captivity for some time . . . and there was no indication of the violent immediate symptoms that can be expected from a boomslang bite, such as swelling and painful streaks up the arm as in blood-poisoning."

(continued on page 3)

Bulletin No. 21

September-October 1960

"CURATOR DETAILS FIFTEEN-HOUR ORDEAL" (continued)

R. Marlin Perkins

stated: Although its venom is poisonous, very few cases of serious injury or death to human beings by such snakes have been reported. One reason is that the boomslang's poison fangs are in the rear of the upper jaw which makes it more difficult for the snake to deliver a deadly bite. Vipers, cobras and most other poisonous snakes have their poison fangs in the front of the upper jaw. The boomslang is slender and this thirty-inch specimen had a diameter no larger than my little finger."

"September 25, 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. Strong nausea, but without vomiting, during trip to Homewood on suburban train. 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Strong chill and shaking, followed by fever of 101.7 degrees, which did not persist. Bleeding of mucus membranes in the mouth began about 5:30, apparently mostly from gums. Blanket or heating pad. 8:30 p.m. Ate two pieces of milk toast.

"9:00 p.m. to 12:30 a.m.: Slept well no blood in urine before going to sleep, but very small amount of urine -- at 12:30 a.m. mostly blood, but small in amount. Mouth had bled steadily as shown by dried blood at both angles of mouth.

A good deal of abdominal pain, mainly from gas, continuing to 1:00 a.m. only inadequately relieved by belching. A little fitful sleep until 4:00 a.m. when I took an enema -- bowel having failed to move the previous day.

"Took a glass of water at 4:30 a.m. followed by violent nausea and vomiting. The contents of the stomach being the undigested supper. Felt much better and slept until 6:30 a.m.

"September 26, Temperature, 98.2 degrees at 6:30 a.m. Ate cereal and poached egg on toast and applesauce and coffee for breakfast at 7:00. Slight bleeding is now going on in the bowels. No urine, with an ounce or so of blood about every three hours (instead of the several ounces of urine to be expected.) Mouth and nose continuing to bleed, but not excessively." (This was Dr. Schmidt's last entry, made after breakfast on September 26, 1957 -- the morning of the day he died.)

Associates said that he apparently made no further entries because he was up and around later in the morning and had notified the museum that he would be back at work the next day. Unattended by a physician, he went into a coma at 2:00 p.m. An inhalator squad was called and worked to no avail. Then Dr. Schmidt was taken to the hospital. The coroner's record gave 3:15 p.m. as the time of death "upon arrival" at the hospital. An autopsy showed that Dr. Schmidt's death was caused by cerebral hemorrhages as a result of the snake's venom.

According to Medical science, snake venoms are either predominantly hemotoxic (blood affecting) or neurotoxic (nerve affecting), although all venoms contain some of both. Hemotoxin destroys the red blood cells and the inner lining of the blood vessels causing blood to ooze -- or hemorrhage. Neurotoxin, as found in cobras, and to a lesser degree in certain pit-vipers, kills by attacking vital nerve centers and thus causing paralysis.

Virginia Collecting Notes:

McLean, Fairfax County, Va. (September 24, 1960)

McLean members of the VHS will be interested in the following notes from their own "backyard". William L. Witt, co-founder of VHS, his cousin William Wall, and a hiking companion Douglas Steakley, McLean, Va. checked the herpetofauna in the Scott's Run area with the result:

Salamanders

- Northern Dusky Desmognathus f. fuscus
- Northern Two-lined Eurycea b. bislineata
- Long-Tailed Eurycea l. longicauda
- Red-backed Plethodon c. cinereus (red and dark phases)
- Northern Red Pseudotriton r. ruber
- Slimy Plethodon g. glutinosus

Frogs & Toads

- American Toad Bufo terrestris americanus
- Bullfrog Rana catesbeiana
- Pickerel Frog Rana palustris
- Wood Frog Rana sylvatica

Turtles

- Eastern Box Terrapene c. carolina

Snakes

- Eastern Worm Snake Carphophis a. amoenus
- Northern Ringneck* Diadophis punctatus edwardsii*
- Northern Water Natrix s. sipedon

The Ringneck Snake from this area of McLean is an intergrade -- Southern Ringneck Diadophis punctatus punctatus x. p. edwardsii The Northern Ringneck characteristics predominating. Some specimens show the dark spots on the belly scales which are typical of the Southern form. Others in the same locality do not.

SEND IN YOUR COLLECTING NOTES FOR INTERESTING LOCALITIES IN VIRGINIA

(advertisement)

W A N T E D

(advertisement)

SNAKES LIZARDS TURTLES AND AMPHIBIANS --

Make your collecting trips worthwhile. Send us your excess stock of all turtles, snakes, lizards, and certain types of amphibians.

WRITE FOR SHIPPING INSTRUCTIONS AND PRICE LIST (send 25¢ to cover postage, handling) to:

ZOOLOGICALS WORLDWIDE
3725 Lee Highway, Arlington 7, Virginia (Direct Dial.# 703)
phone: JACKSON 7 - 1 4 6 6 (ad placed by: A. J. Abell, member, VHS)

BILL BANNING IMPORTATION OF DANGEROUS ANIMALS SIGNED BY PRESIDENT..

A bill signed by President Eisenhower prohibits importation of the piranha or any animal known to be injurious to plant or animal life. It bars importation of the mongoose, fruit bat and any other animal determined by the Secretary of the Interior to be dangerous. -- Importation of such animals for recognized zoological and scientific purposes is not banned. Copies of the Act as passed by Congress and signed by the President will be obtained for members requesting a copy write: Franklin Tobey, 4706 Tallahassee Ave. Rockville, Maryland.

KEEP THE SOCIETY NOTIFIED OF ANY CHANGE OF ADDRESS OR CORRECTIONS:

LOG-ROLLERS' ROUND-UP: Roger H. Rageot, Curator of Natural History at the Norfolk Museum was in the news early in September as the one who identified a Zeuglodon flipper found by two boys -- George T. Bailey and Kenneth Newton -- who were hunting for shells along the James River south of Hopewell, Va. The bones of the extinct whale-like mammal were uncovered by a small landslide. Thinking they were dinosaur bones, the boys loaded them into a car and took them to the Norfolk Museum for identification. The Zeuglodon bones, Rageot said: "are between 30 and 55 million years old." * * * This incident is a tribute to the scientific curiosity of students -- a factor which this society has long recognized and which it has made efforts to encourage. VHS recognizes the value of student collecting and note-taking. Guiding such interested and enthusiastic amateurs is a part of the Society's program in filling in gaps in Va. herpetology. * * * * Bill Palmer, Curator of Hampton Marine Branch of N.C. State Museum, Morehead City, N.C. states in a letter to Rageot that he (Mr. Palmer) obtained a clutch of Scarlet King Snake eggs (Lampropeltis d. doliata) and has three healthy, feeding hatchlings. * * * * * A female Canebrake Rattlesnake (Crotalus h. atricaudatus) gave birth to eighteen baby rattlers, according to Bill Palmer. We hope he has settled the problem of the adoption of twelve of these. * * * * *

Among those present at the NZP meeting this year (see page one) were: Two airmen -- Bill Witt, recently returned from Okinawa; and Les Via, back from Tyndall AFB, Florida. T. Darrell Drummond of Seneca, Md. science instructor and Visual Aids expert extraordinaire, pitched in and operated the film projector. Robert Tuck, VHS member from Point-of-Rocks, Md., freshly from his Lake Michigan zoology research project (See VHS-B # 20) took in the NZP meeting on his way back to Michigan State University at East Lansing, Mich. * * * A hardy group of members fought the one-hour time difference coming up from Richmond, Va. These stalwarts were: Robert Gagnon and his son Billy, Wally Evans and Robin Lapsley -- all of Richmond or nearby. * * * Several of our lady members graced the meeting -- Mrs. Evelyn Rogot of Bethesda, Md. and student members Barbara Pospisiel and Sharon Kennedy from Arlington and Falls Church, Va., respectively. * * * The Keeler family and Millsback brothers, who, with "Butch" Abell and Wesley Hawley, have attended virtually every event the Society has held, came out once again (continued on back page):-

LOG-ROLLERS' ROUND-UP: (continued from page 5) The Round-up has the sad duty of reporting a few eminent "strays". Dr. John T. Wood and family -- all VHS members -- have moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan. (We hope, temporarily!) J.T. Wood, M.D. plans four years of medical specialty training. His address will be 1528 Greenview Drive, Ann Arbor, Michigan. He will continue to receive and (we hope) contribute to the VHS-Bulletin. He and his family will be much in our thoughts and we look forward to his eventual return to Virginia where he has done so much in the interest of the state's herpetology. A note, or Christmas card to the Wood family from VHS members and friends, would be a welcome word from those who have enjoyed his guidance and great inspiration. We will miss Dr. Wood, Mrs. Wood and John F. Wood, who, with the younger family members have attended our statewide meetings. * * * Similarly, members will wish to send Christmas greetings to W. Leslie Burger, current VHS president, at Franklin College, Franklin, Ind.

Christmas gift suggestion for parents of prospective VHS members:

"Children should know the unvarnished facts about animals," says Chevy Chase, Md. resident Robert M. McClung. He has written more than seventeen books about animals, for children. "There are really no 'villains' in nature," he says. "Most people regard all meat-eating animals as villainous, but actually the wolf has just as much right to eat as the more appealing rabbit. I think it is important that children understand this." One of the most successful of McClung's books, published in 1958, concerns a rattlesnake. "Buzztail" got a very nice response from children," he says. "I think the book gave them not only an interest in rattlesnakes, but a healthy respect for them." The author is an Associate Editor with National Geographic magazine. He was formerly Curator of Mammals and Birds at the N.Y. Zoological Park.
