

FURTHER INSTANCES OF ACARINE PARASITES ON SAND  
LIZARDS (*LACERTA AGILIS*)

By

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Referring to Mr. Robert V. Skinner's report in a previous issue of the Journal (Vol. 2, No. 5, p. 93), it is considered that further occurrences of acarine parasites on Sand Lizards should be placed on record. A small number of lizards were caught in September, 1956, more or less in the same locality as the one caught by Mr. Skinner, i.e., in the heathland between Studland and Shell Bay, Dorset. Most of the specimens caught were juveniles, but of the adults two females were found to have ticks in the region of the forelimbs and throat. These parasites were dispatched to the British Museum (Natural History) and identified as the nymphs and adults of the tick, *Ixodes reduvius*.

An adult female lizard caught on the same stretch of heathland in May, 1961, also had a large tick adhering to its throat.

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AN INFESTATION OF GRASS SNAKES NEAR SWANSEA

By

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The Grass snake or Ringed snake, *Natrix natrix helvetica*, is widely distributed in Wales and is recorded for every county, sometimes reaching a great size. One of the largest Grass snakes recorded for the British Isles, measuring 5 feet 9 inches in length, was taken in Glamorgan.

It seems worth while reporting the following case of infestation of a house in South Wales by Grass snakes. About the middle of September, 1961, a young specimen was sent for identification to the Zoology Department, National Museum of Wales, by Mr. Ieuan Lewis, Chief Public Health Inspector at Pontardawe, about 8 miles N.E. of Swansea. This was one of a number of small snakes which were reported to him during that month as infesting a house and "lean-to" building in the Pontardawe area. The infestation seemed to originate in the lean-to building, which is described by Mr. Lewis as a stone-built structure of random rubble with a slated lean-to underdrawn roof; abutting on and communicating with the scullery on one side and adjacent to the living-room walls on another. On both remaining sides soil abutted to the height of the eaves, the house being built on a sloping hillside overgrown with weeds, brambles and long grass. The lean-to was in poor structural condition, with missing slates, open joint-work on the outside and defective ceiling and wall-plaster on the inside.

A large snake stated to be about four feet long (obviously a Grass snake since even a big Adder barely exceeds half that length) was seen and killed at the beginning of September. The infestation by young snakes was reported to Mr. Lewis on September 13th, and nearly fifty of them were seen during the next few days and most of them killed, six being saved and sent to the National Museum.

It was concluded after inspection that the eggs must have been located deeply in the walls of the lean-to or in soil abutting on the walls, and that the access of the young into the house was by way of the eaves and holes between ceilings and walls. The property is old and in need of general reconditioning throughout, and steps had already been taken before the infestation to rehouse the two occupants and undertake repairs. No reports of snakes have been received subsequently.

It is interesting to note that a somewhat similar infestation, although on a much larger scale, was reported many years ago in the same district by G. Leighton in *The Life History of British Serpents* (1901). This has become the classical example of snake-infestation in Great Britain, being repeated by J. T. Cunningham in his *Reptiles, Amphibians and Fishes* (1912), by Arthur Loveridge in the *Glamorgan County History* (1936), and by Malcolm Smith in *The British Amphibians and Reptiles* (1954). It occurred in a house at Cefn-y-caeau near Llanelly, also in the month of September. The young snakes apparently entered the house through a hole in the masonry of the back wall, and on taking down a portion of that wall forty bunches each containing about thirty eggs were discovered, all on the point of hatching. As at Pontardawe, the house was in a poor state of repair and was built on a hillside so that the field at the back was higher than the level of the ground floor. It is not unusual for several female Grass snakes to assemble in the same place for the purpose of egg-laying, although seldom in a house or in such numbers.

The young snakes I received from Pontardawe ranged from about seven up to eight inches in length (174 to 200mm.) and probably none of them were more than two or three days old. Smith gives the length on hatching as from 160 to 190mm.

A fully-grown female Grass snake will lay between thirty and forty eggs, very occasionally more; although young females may lay under a dozen. If the figure of "nearly fifty" young snakes actually seen and destroyed is approximately correct, the Pontardawe infestation may have been caused by at most two or three females, or even only one.

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