IN UNKNOWN ARABIA

BY

MAJOR R. E. CHEESMAN, O.B.E.

REGULAR ARMY RESERVE OF OFFICERS; HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S CONSUL IN NORTH-WEST ABYSSINIA; FORMERLY PRIVATE SECRETARY TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR IRAQ, 1920–23

F.R.G.S.; CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON; *MEMBER OF THE BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION*; AWARDED GILL MEMORIAL (1925) BY THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

WITH A FOREWORD BY

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR PERCY Z. COX,

G.C.M.G., G.C.I.E.

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED

ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1926

APPENDIX III

REPTILIA AND BATRACHIA

FROM HASA, JAFURA, AND JABRIN IN EASTERN AND CENTRAL ARABIA

Collected by Major R. E. Cheesman in 1923–1924 and presented to the British Museum

Mr. H. W. Parker of the British Museum (Natural History) has identified the specimens, and their approximate distribution is indicated by him by letters referring to the first paragraph. His remarks have been included in the field notes.—R. E. C.

All the specimens collected belong to previously-known species. Twenty-three Lizards representing ten species, a single Frog, but no Snakes, are present. Of these species, some are confined to Arabia (*a*), some extend only northwards into Persia and N. India (*b*), others only westwards into Egypt and N. Africa (*c*), and others again both northwards and westwards (*d*). —W. H. P.

LACERTILIA

GECKONIDÆ

1. *Ptyodactylus lobatus* Geoffroy (*c*). January 19.

2150. Two half-grown specimens from Jabal Abu Ghanima, Hufuf, in bad condition, but apparently agreeing closely with the typical Arabian form. A desert Gecko inhabiting crevices in sandstone hills. Has large circular discs or lobes at end of the toes. This digital expansion is here at the extremity of the digits. Use: for adhesive purposes. The only method of securing them was by shooting with the ·410 collecting gun; the cartridges were emptied, half the powder reloaded, the wad replaced, and the rest filled up with fine sand instead of shot.

2. *Hemidactylus persicus* Anderson (*b*). November 26: Hufuf.

5041. Two specimens, ♂ and ♀, from Hufuf town. This species has not been previously recorded in Arabia south of

Mesopotamia. Arabic: "Pursee" or "Thator." A house Gecko. In the roof-beams of Hufuf houses. They are not very active now, but come out most evenings. They are almost a transparent white in colour. Digital expansion for adhesive purposes, at the base of digits, the terminal phalanges not being expanded.

AGAMIDÆ

3. *Agama flavimaculata* Rüppel (*c*). February 2 and 24.

5170. ♀, Jabal Aqula, Jabrin.
5209. Two specimens, ♂, Jabrin.

Only found on gravel plains. They remain motionless, depending on mimicry for protection, as they resemble very exactly their environment in colours and shading. Once disturbed, they dash off, tail in air, and can run as fast as a man. These *Agamas* did not seem to have any holes to run to. They bite hard if they can get their gargoyle-like face round your finger. Fingers and toes not fringed.

4. *Phrynocephalus maculatus* Anderson (*b*). February 16 and 20.

♂, Salwa Bay.
5171. ♀, Jabal Aqula, Jabrin.
5178. ♀, S. Jabrin.

Not previously known from Arabia. These were mistaken by me for *Agamas*, which they resemble in the distance; they also run like them. They do not appear to go to earth when pursued. Fingers and toes not fringed. Habitat, gravel plains.

5. *Phrynocephalus arabicus* Anderson (*a*). February 26.

Half-grown, Salwa Bay.
5211. 1 ♂, 2 ♀, Jafura.

Seen only on loose sand-dunes and not on hard gravel. They are found in the scanty shelter afforded by desert bushes and when disturbed run out on to the open sand. After going about ten yards they stop and kick with the hind-legs, working the body into the loose sand. The head, still erect, is left exposed. When all is hidden, down goes the head and disappearance is complete. Each specimen went through exactly the same performance. Here the lateral scales of the digits are much enlarged, forming a serrated fringe on either side. This increases the plantar and palmar surfaces and is an adaptation to walking on the loose sand which is their habitat.

6. *Uromastix microlepis* Blanford (*b*). January 4.

5117. Hufuf (dried specimen).

Arabic "Thub." Spiny-tailed Lizard. Eaten by badawin or brought into towns alive for sale. This specimen was bought in Hufuf market for 30 tawila (sixpence). The body cavity contained two apparently distinct intestines, crammed with green shoots of desert shrubs finely masticated into short lengths. This appearance is due to an enormous enlargement of the first part of the large intestine. This enlargement is probably an adaptation to vegetable food. Cellulose is not dissolved by any vertebrate gastric ferment, and until cellulose is dissolved the cell-contents of food-plants cannot be digested. Bacterial fermentation is essential to remove the cellulose, hence the divided stomach of sheep, etc., providing one compartment for bacterial fermentation and one for commencement of digestive processes.

We saw several on the way to Jabrin in February. They live in large, self-dug holes as big as a rabbit's earth, sometimes with two entrances—generally one—and always in firm, stony ground. When surprised too far from the hole to escape, they squat and lie still; at other times they make all speed for home, and the badawin drop from their camels and give chase and can run a little faster than the lizard. They bite hard and can give a sharp rap with the powerful, spiny tail.

It is said that South American Iguanas taste like chicken. No such recommendation attaches to their Arabian kinsman.

LACERTIDÆ. Arabic "Damus" = all Lizards.

7. *Acanthodactylus boskianus asper* Audouin (*c*). February 20.

5178. ♂ and half-grown, S. Jabrin.

5167. Half-grown, Jafura. This specimen shows the sub-ocular shield bordering the mouth as in *A. boskianus euphraticus* Boulenger, but in all other characters it agrees with *asper*. Badawin "Khusawi." These are long-tailed and fleet of foot and belong to the true Lizards. They live in holes among the roots of desert bushes growing in loose sand. The bushes are isolated and scattered at distances of about twenty yards. The Lizards are often found at some distance from their home, and exciting chases took place from bush to bush before these specimens were secured. Has the strongly fringed digits and sandy habitat.

8. *Acanthodactylus cantoris* Gthr. (*b*). March 1921.

883. Two specimens, Salwa. Lizards with long fringes to toes.

Determined by Miss J. B. Procter.

9. *Acanthodactylus scutellatus* forma typ. Dum. and Bibr. (*c*). February 23—among sand-dunes.

5209. ♀, Jabrin. In the size of the dorsal scales this specimen tends to resemble *A. fraseri* Boulenger from Lower Mesopotamia. *A. scutellatus* has not hitherto been recorded further east than Basra. Another of the true Lizards, very similar in the distance to the above and with the same habits and the strongly fringed digits.

10. *Eremias brevirostris* Blanf. (*b*). March 1921.

882 and 884. Oqair and Salwa. A Lizard with spots, plentiful, and runs fast.

Determined by Miss J. B. Procter.

SCINCIDÆ

11. *Mabuia septemtæniata* Reuss (*d*). December 16.

5080. ♀, Hufuf.

Plentiful in Hufuf palm gardens. This is the well-known horizontally-striped Skink. The skin is smooth and shiny, and the tail is short and thick. In Hufuf on March 4 we went for several miles past palm-trees growing along the path at distances of 100 yards. On the base of each trunk was one of these Skinks, basking in the sun. Not seen outside the garden area. This species has no digital fringes.

12. *Scincus mitranus* Anderson (*a*). February 11, 15 and 26.

5168. Ad. Wadi Sahba.
5158. Ad. Zarnuqa, Hasa.
5212. Ad. Jafura.

I did not see this species in the open; a remarkable Skink from the sand-dune desert only. A flat upper lip gives a wedge shape to the head, adapted for diving head-first into the sand. Colour above, pale pinkish; below, white; with about half a dozen (number not constant) dark red vertical bars straggling irregularly down the sides looking like congealed blood. Their presence is disclosed by their footprints on the steep side of

drift sand to the leeward of the high, moving dunes. Where the track ends there is a round mark where the Skink has buried itself. The badawin plunge their hand about 2 feet into the soft sand and usually produce the Skink. I had an exhibition of their marvellous speed in burying themselves. My boy was in my tent, pitched in soft sand, and was transferring one of these Skinks from one tin to another, when it wriggled its head round towards his fingers and he dropped it. I saw this happen and plunged to the ground at the same time as the Skink, and grabbed, but it was already out of sight below the sand as if by magic. I was told in Hufuf that a certain Lizard is caught in the desert and sold at good prices in Bombay for medicine. It was called Dāmus, which is also a general term for Lizards of all denominations. While not able to speak with certainty, I think it is this Skink. In this species the digits are flattened and the scales produced laterally to a very large extent, so that the hand and foot are almost paddle-like. A closely allied species is sometimes known as the "sand fish," owing to its ability to swim through the sand. It was even described by ancient writers in works on fishes.

BATRACHIA

13. *Rana esculenta ridibunda* Pall (*d*).

5042. ♂, Hufuf.

Hufuf springs and streams. Plentiful. Edible Frog. On November 30 the chorus of Frogs in the gardens at Hufuf could be heard in the evening from my house half a mile away. On January 24 I noted that the males had assumed their courting dress. The skin becomes an emerald-green with a pale line down the centre of the back, and the eye is of shining gold of extra brilliance. The females are brown with circular brown spots. They were still very noisy and were pairing. They have 400 miles of desert between them and the next fresh water at the Shatt al Arab.

I also saw Water Tortoises commonly in the Hufuf streams; they appeared to be the same as those I had previously brought home from Bahrain springs—the Caspian Water Tortoise (*Clemmys caspica*). No Snakes were seen, but several cast skins were noticed in Hasa and Jabrin. They were probably hibernating, and I should say are not plentiful even in summer.

REPTILIA OF THE PERSIAN GULF

In addition to the Reptilia of the Arabian mainland, a list of specimens obtained by Sir Percy Cox's collector (La Personne) and myself on islands of the Persian Gulf is given below as a matter of interest. The specimens were kindly examined and reported on by Miss Joan B. Procter in 1922, and the identification is hers, and she was good enough to add a few notes to give us some idea of the distribution of the various species, which have been included with the field notes.—R. E. C.

CHELONIA

Clemmys caspica Gem. Water Tortoise. Bahrain Island.

Plentiful in the flowing springs of Bahrain. *Dist.*—Caspian Sea to Persian Gulf.

LACERTILIA

Fam. GECKONIDÆ

Alsophylax tuberculatus Blanf. Tanb Island.

Found on rocks. *Dist.*—Mesopotamia; S. Persia to Sind.

Hemidactylus turcicus L. Tanb Island.

Dist.—Borders of Mediterranean and Red Seas; Sind.

Fam. AGAMIDÆ

Uromastix microlepis Blanf. Jabal Dukhan. Bahrain.

Spiny-tailed Lizard. This was so small that I mistook it for a smaller species. It had dug out a burrow for itself, and its colour was black with red spots, much darker generally than that of the mature beast. *Dist.*—Head of the Persian Gulf.

Fam. LACERTIDÆ

Eremias brevirostris Blanf. Tanb Island, March, 1921.

Dist.—Persian Gulf; Punjab.

OPHIDIA

Subfam. COLUBRINÆ

Zamenis ventrimaculatus (Gray). Gray's Whip Snake. Bahrain, March, 1921.

Non-poisonous. Two specimens obtained by Major Daly

on Hasan Island off Bahrain. *Dist.*—From the Euphrates to Kashmir and N.W. India.

Subfam. HYDROPHIINÆ

Hydrophis ornata (Gray). Ornamented Sea Snake. One mile off Tanb Island, April, 1921.

Poisonous. Yellowish-white with sea-green bands, belly white. Both species of these Snakes are common in the Persian Gulf, sleeping coiled up and floating on the surface of the sea on calm days, and scarcely moving when touched by the wash of a steamer. The tail is flattened instead of being round and tapering as in other Snakes. *Dist.*—Mouth of Persian Gulf and coasts of India, Ceylon to New Guinea and N. Australia.

Hydrophis cyanocincta (Daud). Blue-ringed Sea Snake. Khor Abdulla, top of Persian Gulf, May, 1921.

Poisonous. Four feet in length. Black bands, belly white, tail flattened, seen on calm sea as above. *Dist.*—Persian Gulf to coasts of India, China, Japan and Papuasia.

Subfam. VIPERINÆ

Echis carinatus (Schneid). Saw-scaled Viper. Tanb Island, April, 1921.

Poisonous. La Personne says some were of a sandy colour, and others were dark, resembling the rocks, he adds. The island swarms with these Snakes, which take a heavy toll of the live-stock. They issue in the warmer months, April and May. To see if they were poisonous he allowed one to bite a tropic bird (*Phæton*), and it died within a minute. Older editions of *The Persian Gulf Pilot* mention the large number of Snakes on this island. When I visited Tanb on September 23, 1920, and again in March, 1921, I failed to find a single Snake. They are small and thin. *Dist.*—Deserts or sandy districts of Africa north of equator; S. Asia from Transcaspia and Arabia to India.

BATRACHIA ECAUDATA

Fam. RANIDÆ

Rana cyanophlyctis Schneid. Bahrain Island.

Dist.—Southern half of Arabia, and Baluchistan to Malay, and from the Himalayas to Ceylon.