

THE
VICTORIA HISTORY
OF THE COUNTIES
OF ENGLAND

HAMPSHIRE AND
THE ISLE OF WIGHT



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A HISTORY OF
HAMPSHIRE
AND THE ISLE
OF WIGHT

VOLUME ONE



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CONTENTS OF VOLUME ONE

	PAGE
Lepidoptera, Rhopalocera <i>(Butterflies)</i>	By HERBERT GOSS, F.L.S., F.E.S., assisted by W. H. B. FLETCHER, M.A., F.E.S., and Capt. SAVILE REID, F.E.S., late R.E. 130
Lepidoptera, Heterocera (<i>Moths</i>) Nocturni, Geometræ, Dre- panulæ, Pseudo-Bombyces, Noctuæ, Deltoides, Pyralides and Crambites	By HERBERT GOSS, F.L.S., F.E.S., assisted by W. H. B. FLETCHER, M.A., F.E.S., and Capt. SAVILE REID, F.E.S., late R.E. 134
Tortrices, Tineæ, and Ptero- phori	By PERCY M. BRIGHT, F.E.S., assisted by EUSTACE R. BANKES, M.A., F.E.S., CHAS. G. BARRETT, F.E.S., and W. H. B. FLETCHER, M.A., F.E.S. 146
Diptera (<i>Flies</i>)	By FREDERICK C. ADAMS, F.E.S. 154
Hemiptera Heteroptera (<i>Bugs</i>)	By EDWARD SAUNDERS, F.L.S. 160
Hemiptera Homoptera (<i>Cicadas</i>)	By JAMES EDWARDS, F.E.S. 162
Myriapoda (<i>Centipedes, etc.</i>)	By R. I. POCOCK 163
Arachnida (<i>Spiders, Scorpions, etc.</i>)	By F. O. PICKARD-CAMBRIDGE, M.A. 165
Crustacea (<i>Crabs, Lobsters, etc.</i>)	By the Rev. T. R. R. STEBBING, M.A., F.R.S., F.L.S. 185
Pisces (<i>Fishes</i>)	By G. A. BOULENGER, F.R.S., F.Z.S. 197
Amphibia (<i>Amphibians</i>) and Reptilia (<i>Reptiles</i>)	" " " 204
Aves (<i>Birds</i>)	By EDMUND G. B. MEADE-WALDO, F.Z.S., M.B.O.U. 208
Mammalia (<i>Mammals</i>)	By A. TREVOR-BATTYE, M.A., F.L.S., assisted by the Hon. GERALD LASCELLES, B.A., F.Z.S. 239
Early Man	By W. BOYD DAWKINS, M.A., F.R.S., F.S.A. 253
Romano-British Remains	By F. HAVERFIELD, M.A., F.S.A. 265
Silchester	By GEORGE E. FOX, M.A., F.S.A., and W. H. ST. JOHN HOPE, M.A. 350
Anglo-Saxon Remains	By REGINALD A. SMITH, B.A. 373
Introduction to the Hampshire Domesday	By J. HORACE ROUND, M.A. 399
The Text of the Hampshire Domes- day	" " 448
The Winchester Survey	" " 527

REPTILES AND BATRACHIANS

The herpetological fauna of Great Britain being so extremely meagre, it is of interest to observe that Hampshire, together with the adjacent parts of Surrey and Dorsetshire, can boast of possessing indigenous representatives of all the species on the British list, with the exception of the Edible Frog (*Rana esculenta*), perhaps only introduced in the counties of Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, where it has existed for at least nearly a century at any rate. The Isle of Wight on the other hand is not possessed of any but the generally distributed species. It is worthy of remark that the two species which from their restricted range in this country are of special interest, viz. the smooth snake and the sand lizard, agree in having pretty nearly the same geographical distribution in Europe and Western Asia, where, as with us, the former commonly feeds on the latter. Here also in England the localities inhabited by them, viz. the sandy heaths bordering the New Forest district, North Hampshire and South-west Surrey, exactly correspond, although on the Continent these reptiles are by no means confined to such situations, and do not always occur simultaneously—the smooth snake preferring hilly, wooded districts, the sand lizard frequenting open spaces in woods and damp meadows as well as sandy heaths. The name ‘sand lizard,’ an appropriate one with us, is in a general sense inapplicable to Continental examples. Considering the geographical range of these two reptiles, their occurrence in England is a far less remarkable fact than their localization here, for which it is impossible to offer an explanation.

The common lizard, the slow-worm, the adder and the three newts appear to be generally distributed in suitable localities, the natter-jack toad is strictly local and partial to certain sandy spots, while the common frog and toad may be described as ubiquitous, though perhaps nowhere very abundant. Owing to its slow movements and confident disposition, the slow-worm, so useful from its subsisting mainly on slugs, falls an easy victim to the ineradicable superstitious aversion of country people, and its numbers decrease year after year; and hence this once abundant reptile is in greater danger of extermination by human agency than any of its kindred of the British fauna.

The adder or viper, although subjected to the same, but in this case justifiable, persecution, seems to hold its own and is still very abundant especially in the New Forest, where hundreds are destroyed yearly, mostly by a professional viper-hunter well known to the visitors of the Forest. In this country, as on the Continent, cultivation of the land

REPTILES AND BATRACHIANS

appears to be the only efficient agent of extermination of this noxious snake.

REPTILES

LACERTILIA

1. Common Lizard, *Lacerta vivipara* (Jacq.).
2. Sand Lizard, *Lacerta agilis* (Linn.).

Distinguished from the common species by its larger size (it is seven or eight inches in length), its more massive form and bigger head, and the ocellar black-and-white spots with which it is usually marked. Males, especially during spring and early summer, are coloured bright green on the sides and lower parts, and such specimens have often been mistaken from the time of Gilbert White for the green or Jersey lizard, which does not occur in this country. Instead of being, like its congener, ovo-viviparous, this species lays oval white eggs, which take some weeks to hatch.

The sand lizard is widely distributed over Eastern Europe from Sweden and Russia to the Black Sea and the Caucasus, and it is also an inhabitant of a considerable portion of Western Asia; it is common throughout Austria and Germany, but to the west it becomes generally rarer or more local, and is absent from the south-west of France as well as from the Spanish and Italian Peninsulas. In England it has only been found in Hampshire, chiefly in the sandy heaths bordering the New Forest, whence it extends into neighbouring parts of Dorsetshire,¹ Berkshire,² and to Farnham, in Surrey. The latter locality derives special interest from the fact that the lizards found there quite recently by Mr. Bryan Hook are evidently the descendants of the 'beautiful green *lacerti* on the sunny sand-banks near Farnham,' mentioned by Gilbert White in his *Natural History of Selborne*. Curiously, White never came across such lizards in the limits of his own county.

3. Slow-worm, or Blind-worm, *Anguis fragilis* (Linn.).

OPHIDIA

4. Common or Ringed Snake, *Tropidonotus natrix* (Linn.), (*Natrix torquata*, Ray).
5. Smooth Snake, *Coronella austriaca* (Laur.), (*C. lævis*, Lacép.).

First discovered in England by the late Mr. Frederick Bond and the Rev. O. P.-Cambridge between Ringwood and Wimborne in 1853, and by the Hon. Arthur Russell at Bournemouth a few years later, this species was introduced in the British list by the late Dr. J. E. Gray in 1859. Since that time it has been often observed and recorded from Bournemouth, Poole Heath, and about the New Forest. It has also been observed in West Surrey, at Chobham, by Mr. H. N. Ridley, in

¹ Poole Heath.

² Wellington College, as stated by S. Flower.

A HISTORY OF HAMPSHIRE

1882, and quite lately several specimens have been taken near Farnham by Mr. Bryan Hook. The general distribution of this snake is a very extensive one, comprising nearly the whole of Europe, as far north as $62\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ in Scandinavia, Transcaucasia, and Syria. A variety with more pointed snout and larger rostral shield, described as *Coronella italica*, and long believed to be peculiar to Southern Europe, has recently been shown to be represented by certain individuals obtained in Hampshire, proving the form to be untenable as a local variety. The smooth snake unlike the common snake is as a rule of irascible temper, and bites when first caught; but it is perfectly harmless. It bears a certain resemblance in colour to the viper, whose reversed initial it likewise often carries on the back of the head; but it may be readily distinguished by its agility, the round shape of the pupil of the eye, the smooth scales, and, generally, by the absence of a zigzag band down the back. Like the viper but unlike the common snake it is ovo-viviparous, the young issuing immediately after birth from the membranous envelope in which they are invested. The food consists of other reptiles—lizards, slow-worms and even small snakes. The largest British specimens measure only about eighteen inches in length.

6. Common Viper or Adder, *Vipera berus* (Linn.).

This poisonous snake varies much in colour, and the variations have often been regarded as adaptations to the surroundings, as local varieties, or even as species. I have pointed out that, with rare exceptions, specimens with the zigzag dorsal band boldly marked in very dark brown or black are males, whilst those in which the markings are of a paler brown, or more effaced, are females. So-called 'white vipers,' e.g. white with black markings, are invariably males; 'red vipers' are females. The male may be readily distinguished from the other sex by the longer and more swollen tail, with more numerous paired shields on the lower surface, which number thirty-five to forty in males, twenty-eight to thirty-three in females.

BATRACHIANS

ECAUDATA

1. Common Frog, *Rana temporaria* (Linn.).
2. Common Toad, *Bufo vulgaris* (Laur.).
3. Natter-Jack Toad, *Bufo calamita* (Laur.).

This lively little toad is easily distinguished from its congener by the presence, in most cases, of a yellow line along the middle of the back and by its gait. Owing to its remarkably short hind limbs it is quite unable to hop; it supplies the deficiency by running at a considerable pace with the body raised from the ground, but stopping every few seconds. It is a good burrower in sandy localities, for which it shows

REPTILES AND BATRACHIANS

a decided predilection, and requires less moisture than any other batrachian. It often occurs in the sand-hills close to the sea, where in summer adults as well as young may be seen crawling or running about in full sunshine among the sparse tufts of marram grass whilst the eggs and larvæ are developing in neighbouring pools of strongly brackish water. The breeding season falls much later than in the case of the common toad, and takes place as a rule in May and June; unlike the common species, these toads are found in the water only at night, during the breeding season, and produce, after sunset, an excessively loud croak, consisting of one rolling note.

Bufo calamita is found in Western Europe, from the extreme south of Scotland and the west coast of Ireland to the Spanish Peninsula. It is very local with us, although, where it exists, usually more abundant than the common species. In Thomas Bell's time it was found in great numbers in White's garden at Selborne, but, and this is most remarkable when we think of the garrulous nature of this batrachian, it appears to have entirely escaped the notice of the great naturalist. In his edition of White's *Selborne*, Bell remarks that the Natter-Jack, which was once so common, had abandoned his garden, without any cause having ever suggested itself for its disappearance. The toad bred in a pond on the heath at Wolmer. We have other evidence of colonies of this species shifting their quarters, and with a view to an understanding of the causes of the phenomenon, it would be useful to draw up a list of the localities now inhabited by the Natter-Jack, which could easily be done by the co-operation of residents in the county, who would simply need to use their ears immediately after sunset in May and June.

CAUDATA

4. Great Crested Newt, *Molge cristata*, Laur.
5. Common Newt, *Molge vulgaris*, Linn., *Triton punctatus* (Latr.).
6. Palmated Newt, *Molge palmata*, Schn., *Triton palmipes* (Daud.).

The palmated newt is more widely distributed in Great Britain than is the common newt, being the only species found in the greater part of Scotland, in Wales and in Cornwall. It is also found in the Channel Islands, from which the common newt appears to be absent. In most parts of England it occurs in company with the latter. In Hampshire it is known from Selborne and the New Forest, and will probably be found elsewhere. Ryde in the Isle of Wight is among the earliest localities given, and it has since been obtained from Alum Bay and Brading. It resembles the common newt, with which it has often been confounded, but may be distinguished from it at all stages of life and at all seasons by the absence of every trace of pigment on the throat, which is of a transparent flesh colour. The breeding male is easily recognised by the very low, straight-edged dorsal crest, the square shape of the body, the presence of a black web between the toes and by the truncated tail terminating in a thread-like filament.