

A NOTE ON THE SO-CALLED MINUTE SNAKE OF TASMANIA.

By

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There is throughout Tasmania a deeply-rooted belief in the existence in the island of a distinct species of snake, of small size, the "Minute Snake." While it is perhaps usually taken for granted among naturalists that the supposed Minute Snake is simply the young of one of our three duly accredited species, this explanation does not seem to be adequately established by any precise published data, and is, in my experience, almost invariably contested stoutly by bush-dwellers.

The collection of definite evidence on the subject is a matter of surprising difficulty. Time and time again have I been earnestly assured of the specific distinctness of the form in question; but in spite of repeated efforts, encouraged by not a few promises of assistance, it is only during the present year that I have been fortunate enough personally to examine any small snake that has been claimed to be the elusive Minute Snake. In the circumstances, it seems advisable to put on record a note on the result of the examination of two such specimens.

Specimen No. 1.—Received alive at the Museum (Reg. No. 1098) on 30th June, 1933; forwarded by Mr. J. H. White, "Ullapool," Winkleigh, who at my request kindly interested himself in the acquisition of evidence on the matter, and who says of the specimen in a covering letter, "I think it is what we call the Minute Snake." The specimen is a young, but typical, example of *Denisonia coronoides*. Total length, 233 mm.; tail, 43 mm. Dorsal surface olivaceous brown throughout. Ventral surface of head yellowish-grey, spotted with white and dark-brown. Ventral surface of body and tail in general light-orange, tending anteriorly towards yellow, posteriorly towards salmon-pink. Black

streak on side of head, passing through eye, but not continued across rostral; below it, bordering the upper lip, a yellowish-white streak. Scales in 15 rows; longitudinally striated. Ventrals 147, subcaudals (in single row) 55; anal entire. Head-shields fully conformable with specific diagnosis of Boulenger (1896).

Specimen No. 2.—Received alive at the Museum (Reg. No. 1099) on 7th July, 1933; forwarded by Hon. H. A. Nichols, M.L.C., of Ulverstone, who in a covering letter states, "This small but lively snake was caught at Preston recently. I think it is a young whipsnake. Some at Preston think it a new species, called 'minute snake.'" Mr. Nichols' identification is correct; the specimen is a young *Denisonia coronoides*. Total length, 180 mm.; tail, 30 mm. Dorsal surface, viewed with naked eye, dull, slightly olivaceous brown throughout; examination with a lens shows the basal half, or rather more, of each scale bears numerous small isabelline spots. Ventral surface of head dark slate-grey, minutely dotted with whitish. Ventral surface of body and tail yellowish-orange, crossed at bases of scutes by dark-brown transverse bars, best marked anteriorly, obsolescent towards tail. Black streak on side of head, passing through eye, but not continued across rostral; below it, bordering the upper lip, and continued backward along side of body for a distance rather greater than the length of the head, a whitish streak, sparsely speckled with dark-brown. Scales in 15 rows; longitudinally striated. Ventrals 147, subcaudals (in single row) 45; anal entire. Head-shields fully conformable with specific diagnosis of Boulenger (1896).

REFERENCE.

- BOULENGER, G. A. 1896. "Catalogue of the Snakes in the British Museum," Vol. III., London, 1896, pp. 336-337.