

THE VIRGINIA HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY presents a report on:

The OCCURRENCE OF POISONOUS SNAKES IN VIRGINIA, MARYLAND AND D.C.

Five kinds of venomous snakes occur within the state of Virginia. These are: Three Rattlesnakes -- Timber, Canebrake and Carolina Pigmy Rattlers, and two other poisonous snakes -- the Northern Copperhead and the Eastern Cottonmouth. Only two venomous snakes are to be found in the state of Maryland -- the Timber Rattlesnake and the Northern Copperhead. Only one poisonous specie is to be found in the District of Columbia -- the Northern Copperhead. Poisonous Coral Snakes are not found within the area covered by this report.

Contrary to widespread belief, the range of the venomous Eastern Cottonmouth (popularly called the "water moccasin" - along with harmless water snakes) is limited to the southeastern corner of Virginia. Examples of the common venomous and harmless snakes may be seen at the Reptile House of the National Zoological Park, or in the National Museum.

THE TIMBER RATTLESNAKE (*Crotalus h. horridus*) Linnaeus, ranges widely over the western part of Virginia. In all probability it occurred throughout the Piedmont, just as it did in Maryland and North Carolina. Perhaps because rattlers are less secretive than Copperheads, Rattlers have been killed off in many areas where Copperheads still abound. Most of the actual recorded range of the Timber Rattler lies west of a line extending from Martinsville, Va. through Lynchburg, Charlottesville and Warrenton, to Leesburg, Va. To the east of this line Timber Rattlers are known only in Buckingham and Culpepper counties. In Fairfax County two Timber Rattlers are on record -- both from the Falls Church area -- one record is from circa 1886, the other found without a head near the Fairfax Airport (Rt. 50) in 1955 is believed to have been inadvertently flown in from an airfield in the western highlands. There is always a chance that relic populations may be discovered in other counties east of the Blue Ridge mountains. In Maryland, the Timber Rattler is found in the northern highland counties. One specimen, found in Kent County, Md. is believed to be an "escapee". None are recorded, even historically, from the District of Columbia.

THE CANEBRAKE RATTLESNAKE (*Crotalus horridus atricaudatus*) Latreille, has been recorded only in southeastern Virginia. Except for a case of rattlesnake bite at Hopewell, Va., definite localities for this snake are limited to the four southeastern border counties of Virginia -- Southampton to Princess Anne -- and the lower York-James Peninsula -- Hampton and Warwick. Verbal reports of rattlesnakes killed in James City County, near Williamsburg, Va. and near Saluda in Middlesex County, and in Prince William County near Quantico, require verification.

The Canebrake Rattler is not recorded from Maryland. The rattlers of the New Jersey Pine Barrens are said to resemble the Canebrake more closely than the Timber Rattlesnake. Apparently, Canebrake Rattlers once ranged north along the Atlantic Coast to New Jersey. Relict populations may be found almost anywhere in the Coastal Plain of Virginia.

(Report continued on next page (over)).

Venomous Snakes of Va., Md., and D.C.

The EASTERN COTTONMOUTH (*Agkistrodon p. piscivorus*) Lacépède, occupies almost the same part of Virginia as the Canebrake Rattler. Cottonmouths are common in places in Princess Anne and Norfolk counties and occur occasionally as far west as Petersburg, Va. They have not been definitely recorded north of the James River, but their occurrence in some places on the York-James Peninsula would not be surprising. The Eastern Cottonmouth is not found in Md.

The NORTHERN COPPERHEAD (*Agkistrodon contortrix mokeson*) Daudin, is found in most parts of Virginia but is rare or absent at altitudes greater than 4,000 feet above sea level. Goodwin and Wood (1956, Virginia Journal of Science, Vol. 7, pages 19-21) have suggested that the Copperhead is absent from the part of the lower York-James Peninsula where the Canebrake Rattlesnake is the sole venomous type. Specimens of the Copperhead from southeastern Virginia often have slightly different color patterns from those found elsewhere in the state. These Copperheads are tending toward the southern subspecies but are closer to the northern subspecies. Intermediate (intergrading) populations of Copperheads like these seem to occupy a wide zone of Atlantic Coastal Plain extending from Southern Maryland to Greenville, North Carolina. The Northern Copperhead is found in all Maryland counties on the western shore, but rarely on the eastern shore where it has been reported from only Wicomico and Worcester counties. The St. Mary's County Copperheads are said to show an intergradation with the Southern Copperhead (*Agkistrodon c. contortrix*).

The PIGMY RATTLESNAKE (*Sistrurus m. miliarius*) Linnaeus, has been found only at one spot just over the North Carolina-Virginia line within Virginia in Norfolk County. The official report of this finding is yet to be made by Roger H. Rageot and W. Leslie Burger both Co-Founders of the VHS. W. Leslie Burger, from whose writings much of this report is taken, is President of the Society this year.

OTHER POISONOUS SNAKES have been credited to Virginia, either in error or with questionable data. The Eastern Coral Snake (*Micrurus f. fulvius*) Linnaeus, and the Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake (*Crotalus adamanteus*) de Beauvois, have been mentioned as native Virginian species, but neither are definitely known north of Albemarle Sound, North Carolina.

ADDITIONS: New locality records for poisonous snakes and for other Virginia reptiles and amphibians are being actively gathered to complete our knowledge of their distribution. For technical purposes, the only bona fide proof of the occurrence of a snake in a particular area is a specimen from there. We hope that enthusiastic naturalists will be willing to present live specimens to zoos and preserved specimens to museums and college or university depositories, from precisely indicated localities. Notice to VHS of such action will be appreciated. Such material will be reported in the VHS Bulletin.

CREDITS: Dr. John T. Wood, W. Leslie Burger, O.K. Goodwin, John E. Cooper, Roger H. Rageot, to the extent that they are not credited with any names which may have inadvertently been introduced herein

LOG-ROLLERS' ROUND-UP

Fred R. Scott, biologist of Richmond, Va. and member of VHS has asked us to publish a letter dated July 4, 1960 (we are late with it) which he received from Mr. Hal H. Harrison of WILDLIFE ADVENTURE SHOWS, of 1102 Highland Street, Tarentum, Pennsylvania. Mr. Harrison may be interested in hearing from VHSers who can supply or loan needed examples of herps for completion of a film. The letter excerpts follow:

"I am producing a non-commercial film on the Reptiles and Amphibians of West Virginia (and, with a few additions and subtractions, Pennsylvania). Also, I am doing another film on the Lampropeltis genus

"At the moment, I am in great need of Pseudotriton montanus montanus. *... sent me a beautiful specimen of Pseudotriton m. diastictus (The Midland Mud Salamander) from Huntington, West Virginia, but the Eastern race has eluded me. (* - ref: Dr. H. Bayard Green, Zoology Dep't, Marshall College, Huntington, W.Va.)

Also, I need a Worm Snake (Carphophis a. amoenus) and, believe it or not, a plain old Cricket Frog (Acris crepitans).

I would appreciate your help in securing the above. The film, when completed, will be available to you and the Virginia Herpetological Society for viewing free of charge.

The film on the King and Milk Snakes will also be available. From your area I need: Scarlet King Snake (Lampropeltis d. doliaia), Coastal Plain Milk Snake (L. d. temporalis), Mole Snake (L. calligaster rhombomaculata) and the Scarlet Snake (Cemophora coccinea).

If you can help on these, I will appreciate it. Perhaps you could explain the project to other members of the herp society and enlist their aid. Thanks and very best wishes"... (Hal H. Harrison)

Members who can help Mr. Harrison are invited to write to him at the Tarentum, Pennsylvania address given above.

Robert G. Tuck, Jr. of Point of Rocks, Maryland, member of the VHS -- its first Maryland member -- wrote on July 17, 1960 that he would be spending his summer doing a two-month research project in Zoology on the Beaver Islands, a group in northern Lake Michigan. He had expected to be "tracking down snakes and lizards in Frederick and Loudoun Counties." Instead, he has been working under a research grant from the National Science Foundation. He promised his professor at Michigan State University, well-known herpetologist Dr. Max Hensley, that he would take notes on the herpetofauna of the islands as well as the mammals. The Beaver Island group has been covered, in part, by other, earlier expeditions. Clifford H. Pope has visited the island group on one of these. Tuck is devoting his attention primarily to Garden I. of the Beaver Island group.

R.H.Tuck is a 1959 graduate of Frederick (Md.) High School and a Zoology major at Michigan State University. He was selected by Dr. Rolin H. Baker, director of the Michigan State University Museum, to carry out the project on the Beaver Islands. The true animal populations of these islands are largely unknown. It is expected there will be found some differences between island and mainland forms of the same species. The work is being undertaken in cooperation with the Michigan Conservation Department.

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THE REPORT ON THE OCCURRENCE OF POISONOUS SNAKES of Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia, presented on page one and two of this newsletter, is in keeping with the Society's aim to present information of general interest. It is our hope that members will welcome such reports. As many realize, more commonly it is misinformation, rather than fact on this particular topic, that enjoys popular currency. Let us all try to keep the record straight and correct it where it errs.

FUTURE BULLETINS will cover subjects of general or special herpetological interest. Suggestions and copy for future issues are welcome. Please write the editor at 4706 Tallahassee Avenue, Rockville, Md. (FT)

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THE AUGUST BULLETIN WILL BE DEVOTED TO REGIONAL SURVEYS AND MEETING ANNOUNCEMENTS-

THE BIG FALL MEETING WILL BE AT THE NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL PARK

NORFOLK MEETING IS STILL PENDING COMPLETION OF PLANS, SETTING OF A DATE -- WE HOPE TO GET THE SOUTHEASTERN VIRGINIA MEMBERS AND FRIENDS TOGETHER THIS FALL, OR AT THE LATEST, EARLY IN THE SPRING OF 1961 : MEMBERS IN THE HAMPTON-NEWPORT NEWS-NORFOLK AREA GET BEHIND THIS BY WRITING TO VHS OFFICERS AND OFFERING YOUR ASSISTANCE.