

NOTES ON AN ABERRANT SPECIMEN OF COLUBRID SNAKE,
ENHYDRIS ENHYDRIS (SCHNEIDER)

S. K. TALUKDAR

Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta

ABSTRACT

An aberrant specimen of the colubrid snake, *Enhydris enhydris* (Schneider) was obtained from the Palta Water Works, Palta, 24-Parganas district, West Bengal. The snake possesses two well-differentiated heads. Details of this anomaly are presented in this communication.

INTRODUCTION

During the course of my investigation on the reptiles of Lower Bengal, an aberrant specimen of a colubrid snake, *Enhydris enhydris* (Schneider), collected from the vicinity of the Palta Water Works, Palta, 24-Parganas district, West Bengal, was noted. The specimen is characterised by two well-differentiated heads bifurcated from the neck region. Double-headed snakes occur as occasional freaks. In the present specimen both the heads appear to have originated from a common axis in the cervical region. Furthermore, it is evident that one of the heads has bifurcated a little earlier than the other (Plate II) and has a bend to the left, indicating anterior dichotomy.

Material examined : 1 ex., juv. ; from the vicinity of the Palta Water Works, Palta, 24-Parganas district, West Bengal ; Coll. S. L. Hora ; 27 July, 1930 (ZSI Regd. No. 23561).

Measurements : 164 mm standard length ; 41 mm tail length ; 11 mm head lengths and

6 mm maximum breadth of heads. The neck of the second head (which has a bend to the right) is 3 mm more than that of the first.

DISCUSSION

The occurrence of such anomaly is recorded by Wall (1905) in *Lycodon* Boie, 1826. Wall remarked "Such anomaly arises from a cleavage of one or other pole of the developing embryo and may occur either anteriorly or posteriorly". Dobson (1873) also recorded the occurrence of such abnormality in the Wolf Snake, *Lycodon aulicus* (Linnaeus), which is present in the Zoological Survey of India (Regd. No. 7965). Acharji (1945) reported an example of the Russell's Viper, *Vipera russelli* (Shaw), with two distinct heads on one body. Buckland [see Wall (*op. cit.*)] stated "There are two specimens of European Grass snakes with two heads on one body in the Royal College of Surgeons' Museum, London" Shortt (1868) mentioned a marine species of snake of the genus *Hydrophis*

Latreille, 1802, caught at Madras with two heads. Wall (*op. cit.*) referred to Nicolson's book 'Indian Snakes' (p.22) and mentioned a young two-headed snake of the genus *Xenochrophis* Günther, 1864, preserved in the Madras Museum. He, further, referred to 'Madras Times' of January 13, 1897, a specimen of a two-headed snake in the possession of Mr. Fisher of New York. The specimen was later confirmed as the American Hog-nosed snake, *Heterodon simus* (Linnaeus), which is a foot long and over four months old. Flower (1899) described a water snake, *Homolopsis buccatta* (Linnaeus), preserved in Thailand Museum, with two heads, side by side, each about equally and perfectly developed. Johnsons (1901) presented skiagrams of 13 specimen of snakes collected from the various museums in America and referred to 17 other instances of such anomaly culled from literature dating as far back as 640 AD. Very recently, Talukdar (1977) recorded such phenomenon in a Checkered Keelback, *Xenochrophis piscator* (Schneider), taken from the Chota Nagpur plateau of Bihar.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is grateful to the Director, Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta, for kindly providing the laboratory facilities. His heartfelt thanks of gratitude are due to Dr. B. Biswas and Dr. K. C. Jayaram, Deputy Directors for patient correction of the manuscript and valuable suggestions. He is indebted to Dr. R. C. Sharma, Zoologist

for his keen interest, co-operation and encouragement.

REFERENCES

- ACHARJI, M. N. 1945. Axial-bifurcation in [*Vipera russelli* (Shaw)] from Bengal. *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.*, **45** (5): 611-613.
- DOBSON, G. E. 1873. On a double-headed snake presented to the Indian Museum by Dr. R. F. Thompson, Civil Surgeon, Hughli. *Proc. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 1873, pp. 23-24.
- FLOWER, S. S. 1899. Notes on a second collection of Reptiles made in the Malay Peninsula and Siam from November 1896 to September 1898, with a list of species recorded from these countries. *Proc. zool. Soc. Lond.*, 1899, pp. 600-696.
- JOHNSON, R. H. 1901. Axial bifurcation in snakes, *Trans. Wisconsin Acad.*, **13**: 523-535.
- SHORTT, JOHN. 1868. Notices of a Double-headed Water-snake. *J. Linn. Soc. (Zoology)*, **9**: 49-50.
- TALUKDAR, S. K. 1977. A case of anterior dichotomy in a colubrid snake, *Xenochrophis piscator* (Schneider) [Reptilia: Serpentes: Colubridae] *Sci. Cult.*, **43** (12): 538-539.
- WALL, F. 1905. Double-headed snake. *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.*, **16**: 386, 752.