

STRANGE HABITS OF SNAKES

Curious Instances of Their Intelligence Told by a Snake Lover.

SNAKE ADVENTURES IN SOUTH AFRICA

A Fight Between Two Little Shrews and a Big Poisonous Adder—A Mink's Appetite for Snake Meat.

I saw the first instance of the hibernation of snakes in this country in 1892. At Greenville, Jersey City, there was a large heap of rubbish—stable-sweepings, I believe—which lay near the creek at the west end of Cater street.

Now the question is, Did the snakes spy out this measure during the summer and decide that it would be a proper place to winter in, or, if they didn't, how came the whole thirty-nine to find it. Probably my experiences during the autumn just passed will give the true explanation of this puzzling question.

His Neighbors, the Snakes. My house situated in the midst of thick woods, with here and there some rocky hillocks, open sunny spaces, and frequent swamps. I have had every opportunity of observing the proceedings of my ophidian neighbors as well during the heat of the past summer as when the weather grew cooler.

When the cold wind of the end of September warned me to increase my clothing I noticed that the snakes had also taken heed of it, for I now began to find them five or six together around sunny rocks, or in some sheltered patch of sunshine in the thickest copse.

Getting Ready for Winter. About the middle of October I saw quite a number of garter-snakes on a rock-wooded hillside.

I soon found out where some of them had gone. In one corner of the grounds attached to my house there is an old well, now disused. Once only during the summer had I found a snake at this well, and that was at a time when water was scarce in the woods.

Five Snakes in a Cellar. About this time also I found the freshly cast skin of a large water-snake in the cellar of a neighbor's house; it had evidently gone there to hibernate. A search in my own cellar revealed a very interesting state of things.

But the cellar is not the only part of the house where the snakes have come in to hibernate. Since the weather grew severe I have looked at them several times, but I have found them always in the same position.

Though snakes sleep through the winter it is very evident that, in this country, some of their enemies are very wide awake. During the last two falls of snow I noticed the tracks of some animal passing in and out of a hole under the steps leading up to my front door.

That the snakes were exposed to some enemy in the ant-hills was evident, for I would often find the skeleton of one cleanly picked. For a long time this puzzled me, until I noticed that I often found nests of shrews in the ant-hills. Most tiny quadrupeds they were not more than an inch and half in length, and weighed not more than a quarter of an ounce, and yet I have seen two of them kill a snake fifteen inches long, and eat a great part of him afterward.

It is not to be supposed that every snake succeeds in finding a hiding place satisfactory to him before the frost sets in. I have found the still abiding seeking a refuge as late as November 10. Late in the evening on that date I met with two lying out exposed in the woods, overtaken by the cold, so benumbed that they could scarcely move, and ready to fall a prey to the first predator that came within their range to find them. On being taken into the

STORY OF A UNIQUE COURT

Over it Presides a Husky Terror to Wife Beaters.

PENNSYLVANIA ALDERMANIC SOLOMON

Lacks Faith in Prison Cells and Issues and Enforces His Mandates with Persuasive Eloquence.

The Solomon of Pennsylvania is an alderman who presides over a court at Wilkes-barre, and his name is Donohue. Just now the country is applauding his method of dispensing justice to wife-beaters, and a sketch of his career furnished by the Philadelphia Press is timely and entertaining.

The alderman's temple of justice is a little two-room affair, which is crowded every time he is going to sit. A row of benches face the desk and a bench for the accommodation of the prisoners is at one side of it. It is seldom that there is seating room for all of them. On the other side is the witness stand, and the evidence given from that plain stand would furnish every humorist in the country with material enough for a lifetime.

The alderman is a florid, round, genial man of 48, with a sharp, decisive tongue, a commanding manner and a knowledge of law which is not confined to the text-books, for much of it is his own, and good at that.

"Law," says the alderman, "is not so much for punishment of evidence as it is a cure for evil doing. It is a medicine which must be administered according to the symptoms. For instance, the symptoms of wife-beating is bullism. Knock the bullism out of the bully and he becomes meek and mild. Knock the same thing out of a wife-beater and he'll light the fires every morning, fetch the coal, nurse the baby and say, 'Yes dear' to his wife."

DRAWING A RATTLER'S FANGS

period. That they all had their appetites interrupted by the first cold only, is evident from the fact that this year and other years when I have been more careful to keep them at an equal heat, they have all continued feeding and casting their skins as if no winter were reigning outside; the casting of their skins is, I may mention, a thing they do not do in hibernation.

Now, it is only reasonable to suppose that the interruption of appetite and great sensibility to cold, and this desire to seek warmer quarters operates the same when the snakes are at large in the woods, as when they are in captivity. And in fact, my observations of the wild snakes on the rocky hillock and elsewhere lead to that conclusion.

Snakes become so sluggish during the period of their hibernation that they do not even resent being touched and handled. I have taken venomous rattlesnakes and drawn their fangs with my fingers without the least danger, although this usually requires the use of a pair of forceps. I had a photograph taken showing how this was done. Such treatment shows that snakes must be almost insensible to pain during hibernation.

Queer Retreat.

Strangely enough the snakes of tropical countries hibernate the same as their cousins in the north. It was in South Africa in May or June, 1878, that I made my first acquaintance with snakes in their winter sleep. Although the eastern province of the Cape Colony is a country where frost is never seen except in a very slight degree, still the snakes there retire from the winter.

And the retreat of most of the smaller ones is very curiously and wisely chosen. There is in South Africa a species of termite or white ant, which constructs large ant hills all over the face of the country, but chiefly on the open plains. These mounds are made by the ants carrying up the soil from beneath and piling it in a honey-combed rounded heap on the surface. These erections are generally three or four feet high and four or five in diameter at the base.

When new or when still occupied by the ants they are almost as hard as stone; but when the ants for some cause leave them, as they often do, these adamantine dwellings soon become softer from the action of the weather and of natural decay. It is into these deserted ant hills that the smaller snakes desert their way when the time for hibernation arrives. Consequently my method of snare hunting in the winter was to take with me a hoe to break open the ant hills, so as to find the snakes concealed there. In consequence of my having discovered this retreat of the snakes I used to add far more to my collection in the winter time than in summer. Nearly every deserted ant hill would have some snakes in it. Sometimes I would find as many as ten or a dozen in a single one, often two or three, but as deserted ant hills are very numerous my day's catch would be quite considerable. The snakes would seldom be together in the same part of the ant hill but would be scattered generally throughout. That these deserted abodes of the ants were really the very best spots in South Africa for snakes to pass the cold winter in I have no doubt whatever, and they deserve credit for choosing them, because the ant hill being honey-combed all through the interior and mostly weather-proof outside, the sun during the day would heat up the whole structure and the air in the chambers would preserve the warmth through the night.

Shrews Against Adders.

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G. R. O'REILLY.

Yonag Woman Commits Suicide.

CHICAGO, Dec. 23.—The body of Miss De-monia Lawton, who with her brother and sisters came to Chicago from Kansas City a few weeks ago, was found in her room today. She had taken chloroform and had apparently been dead for two days. Miss Lawton was supposed to be visiting friends in Evanston. She had been suffering recently from ill health.

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Wife-Beater Cared of the Practice.

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