

On the Minhocôo of the Goyanese. By M. AUGUSTE DE SAINT-HILAIRE*.

Luiz Antonio da Silva e Souza, whose acquaintance I made during my travels, and to whom we owe the most valuable researches on the history and statistics of Goyaz, says, in speaking of the lake of Padre Aranda, situated in this vast province†, that it is inhabited by minhocôes‡; then he adds that these monsters—it is thus he expresses himself—dwell in the deepest parts of the lake, and have often drawn horses and horned cattle under the water§. The industrious Pizarro, who is so well acquainted with all that relates to Brazil, mentions nearly the same thing, and points out the lake Feia, which is likewise situated in Goyaz, as also being inhabited by minhocôes||.

I had already heard of these animals several times, and I considered them as fabulous, when the disappearance of horses, mules and cattle, in fording the rivers, was certified by so many persons, that it became impossible for me to doubt it altogether.

When I was at the Rio dos Pilões, I also heard much of the minhocôes; I was told that there were some in this river, and that at the period when the waters had risen, they had often dragged in horses and mules whilst swimming across the river.

The word *minhocôo* is an augmentative of *minhoca*, which in Portuguese signifies *earth-worm*; and indeed they state that the monster in question absolutely resembles these worms, with this difference, that it has a visible mouth; they also add, that it is black, short, and of enormous size; that it does not rise to the surface of the water, but that it causes animals to disappear by seizing them by the belly.

When, about twenty days after, having left the village and the river of Pilões, I was staying with the Governor of Meiapont, M. Joaquim Alvez de Oliveira, I asked him about these minhocôes: he confirmed what I had already been told, mentioned several recent accidents caused by these animals, and assured me at the same time, from the report of several fishermen, that the minhocão, notwithstanding its very round form, was a true fish provided with fins.

I at first thought that the minhocão might be the *Gymnotus Carapa*, which according to Pohl¶ is found in the Rio Vermelho, which is near to the Rio dos Pilões; but it appears from the Austrian writer that this species of fish bears the name of *Terma termi* in the country; and moreover the effects produced by the Gymnoti are, according to Pohl, well-known to the mulattos and negroes who often felt them, and have nothing in common with what is related of the minhocão. Professor Gervais, to whom I mentioned my doubts, directed my attention to the description which P. L. Bischoff has given of the

* This notice is taken from an unpublished work on the province of Goyaz.

† The province of Goyaz stretches from nearly 5° 22' lat. south to the 22nd degree, and is greater than France.

‡ Plural of minhocão.

§ See Memoria sobre o descobrimento, etc. da capitania de Goyaz in the 'Patriota,' 1814.

|| Memorias Historicas, etc., vol. ix. p. 332.

¶ Reise, vol. i. p. 360.

*Lepidosiren**; and indeed the little we know of the minhocão agrees well enough with what is said of the rare and singular animal discovered by M. Natterer.

That naturalist found his *Lepidosiren* in some stagnant waters near the Rio da Madeira and of the Amazon: the minhocão is not only said to be in rivers, but also in lakes. It is, without doubt, very far from the lake Feia to the two localities mentioned by the Austrian traveller; but we know that the heats are excessive at Goyaz. *La Serra da Paranahyba e do Tocantim*†, which crosses this province, is one of the most remarkable dividers of the gigantic water-courses of the north of Brazil from those of the south; the Rio dos Pilões belongs to the former, as does the Rio da Madeira. The *Lepidosiren paradoxa* of M. Natterer has actually the form of a worm, like the minhocão. Both have fins; but it is not astonishing that they have not always been recognized in the minhocão, if, as in the *Lepidosiren*, they are in the animal of the Rio dos Pilões reduced to simple rudiments. "The teeth of the *Lepidosiren*," says Bischoff, "are well-fitted for seizing and tearing its prey; and to judge of them from their structure and from the muscles of their jaw, they must move with considerable force." These characters agree extremely well with those which we must of necessity admit in the minhocão, since it seizes very powerfully upon large animals and drags them away to devour them. It is therefore probable that the minhocão is an enormous species of *Lepidosiren*; and we might, if this conjecture were changed into certainty, join this name to that of the minhocão to designate the animal of the lake Feia and of the Rio dos Pilões. Zoologists who travel over these distant countries will do well to sojourn on the borders of the lake Feia, of the lake Padre Aranda, or of the Rio dos Pilões, in order to ascertain the perfect truth—to learn precisely what the minhocão is; or whether, notwithstanding the testimony of so many persons, even of the most enlightened men, its existence should be, which is not very likely, rejected as fabulous.—*Comptes Rendus*, Dec. 28, 1846.

AWARD OF MEDALS.—LINNÆAN SOCIETY.

A Special General Meeting of this Society was held on Friday the 8th of January, to consider the subject of the following Statement and Resolution of Council relative to the Bequest of the late Edward Rudge, Esq., F.L.S.

The Council, after much patient and anxious deliberation, had unanimously come to the following resolution:—

"Resolved,—That in the opinion of this Council, on a full consideration of the terms of the bequest of the late Edward Rudge, Esq., of the interest of a sum of £200, for the purpose of establishing a Medal 'to be awarded by the President and Council of the (Linnæan) Society, at their discretion, to the Fellow of the said Society who shall write the best communication in each volume which after his (the testator's) decease shall be published by the said Society, in

* *Annales des Sciences Naturelles*, 2^{me} série, tom. xiv. p. 116.

† In an article on the whole of the mountains of Brazil, I shall make known the portion of the chain which should bear this name.



Saint-Hilaire, Auguste de. 1847. "On the Minhocão of the Goyanese." *The Annals and magazine of natural history; zoology, botany, and geology* 19, 140–141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/037454809496469>.

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