

AN EAST AFRICAN GECKO COLONISING ASCENSION ISLAND

By

ARTHUR LOVERIDGE

In April, 1959, among lava blocks on the coastal plain, two geckos were captured by Mr. Bernard Stonehouse of the B. O. U. Expedition to Ascension Island. To my surprise, instead of being referable to the cosmopolitan *Hemidactylus frenatus* Dum. et Bib., I found they were examples of the East African *H. mercatorius* Gray. This led me to appeal to Mr. P. Critchley, long resident on Green Mountain, who very kindly secured, and sent to me, four more geckos which he caught between Devil's Riding School and Table Crater, Ascension Island.

These records demonstrate surprising adaptability on the part of *mercatorius* to a change of habitat, for in East Africa the distribution of the species appeared to be correlated with that of coconut palms. Mr. Critchley informs me that these trees have been established on Ascension but do not thrive; the main grove—consisting of about seventeen palms—is at Two Boats. If introduced as seedlings it is reasonable to assume that the eggs of *mercatorius* were present in the axils of the fronds or among protective packing. Geckos, which invariably lay two hard-shelled eggs, are especially prone to dispersal in this way, especially among oceanic islands. Alternatively the eggs may have arrived in the 17th century by westbound slavers from Madagascar, or with packing or produce landed by one of the Union-Castle ships from East Africa that call each month at Ascension Island.

In the equitable climate of Ascension it is possible that breeding occurs during most of the year. Ova were forming in one of the two ♀♀ received on 13th April; two ovarian eggs measuring 3.5 mm. in diameter were present in one, and two eggs measuring 9×11 mm. in the second of two geckos which arrived on 23rd September; an egg measuring 8×11 mm. was (presumably prematurely) deposited during a fortnight's transit by the only ♀ in whose oviduct a 9×11 mm. egg was present upon her arrival on 2nd November. With her, but in a separate receptacle, Mr. Critchley sent two hard-shelled eggs measuring 8.5×9.5 mm., and 9×10 mm. respectively. In size, therefore, they are comparable to my Tanganyika records of *mercatorius* measuring 8 to 9 mm. in diameter, and Nyasaland ones of from 8.5 to 9.5 mm.

Unfortunately their size also agrees with the eggs measuring 8×9.5 mm. that I collected at the Sanatorium on Green Mountain, Ascension Island, which led me to conclude that *H. frenatus* was present, for I obtained eggs of that species on St. Helena that also measured 8×9.5 mm. For the time being, therefore, the presence of *frenatus* on Ascension must be considered not proven. Incidentally, eggs of *frenatus* that I collected on Lamu Island, Kenya Colony, ranged from 9 to 10 mm. in diameter.

The following data derived from the six adult Ascension geckos, adds little to the known variational range of *mercatorius*, of which *gardineri* Boulenger is a synonym (cf. Loveridge, 1947, Revision of the African Lizards of the Family Gekkonidae, Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool., 98, pp. 181-183).

Nostril surrounded by the rostral, first labial and 3 small nasals, except on the left side of the only ♂ where there are 5 nasals and the labial is excluded; upper nasal separated from its fellow by a single granule, except in the ♂ where anteriorly there are 3 followed by 2; upper labials 8-11; lower labials 6-9; across the back at midbody are

from 12-16 more or less regular longitudinal rows of oval, keeled or subtriangular tubercles; 4-6 scansors under the first toe, 6-9 under the fourth, usually all but the first and last scansors paired; ♂ with 30 (15 + 15) preano-femoral pores. Head and body length of ♂, 57 mm.; of largest ♀, 54 mm., thus exceeding East African mainland maximums but not the Malagasy record of 58 mm. for a ♀ which, like the Ascension lizards had a truncate or regenerate tail.

As these lizards usually appear grey or brown when preserved, I took the opportunity of recording the coloring in life of the ♀ with regenerated tail, taken on 13.iv.59. Above, pinkish buff, from nostril through eye to above the ear a dark sepia brown streak; crown of head blotched with brown and speckled with white; back with a vertebral series of five elongate, rectangular, brown blotches flanked dorso-laterally by an almost continuous, though less well-defined, series of brown markings; between these and the vertebral markings the white (keeled) tubercles form diamond-shaped patterns. Tail with wavy brown crossbars, the intermediate areas distinctly pinkish. Below, white, uniform, except beneath the tail which is flecked with brown and yellow (tip only regenerated).

Another ♀, but with a perfect tail, was substantially similar to the larger example but its tail was more distinctly crossbarred and brighter pink between. Below, the distal portion of the tail exhibits three distinct crossbars in addition to a black tip.

Red scale mites were present on two of the six specimens.

Previously this species was known only from coastal Kenya Colony and Tanganyika Territory; including Pemba Island (and almost certainly Zanzibar and Mafia Islands), the Seychelles and Aldabra Islands, Madagascar and Mauritius; south to Mozambique, inland to Nyasaland.

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THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN IMPALA AND OLIVE BABOON

By

A. M. MORGAN-DAVIES

(Park Warden, Lake Manyara Game Reserve)

The instances of commensalism and symbiosis in the zoological world are as many as they are varied, the acquisition of food being in most cases the main object in view, protection being another. The majority of the better known instances concern the smaller and lower forms of animal life, there be comparatively few recorded instances in which the larger and higher forms are involved.

In the Lake Manyara Game Reserve in Northern Tanganyika two of the most common species of mammals are the impala and olive baboon. Their relationship, on occasions, provides a good example of commensalism, the impala being the beneficiaries. The intermingling of herds of impala and troops of baboon can not fail to strike the more observant visitors to the Reserve and is attributable to the liking shared by both species for certain fruits and seeds.

During October the seed pods of *Acacia sieberiana* DC. are ripe and baboons cluster upon the trees where they gorge themselves upon the seeds and their pods.