Rhamostoma coccinea.
RHINOSTOMA.—Fitzinger.

Genus RHINOSTOMA.—Characters. Head short, small, and not distinct from the neck; rostral plate large, prolonged in front, sub-acuminate, ecarinate above; loral plate single; one anterior and two posterior orbital plates; superior orbital not projecting; mouth small; two posterior maxillary teeth next to the last are largest; body elongated and nearly cylindrical.

RHINOSTOMA COCCINEA.—Blumenbach.

Plate XXX.

Characters. Head small, short; rostral plate large; a trihedral pyramid; body above crimson, marked with about twenty yellow transverse bands, bordered with black; abdomen beautiful silver-white. Pl. 188. Sc. 39.


Description. The head is short, small, not quite so large as the body, with the snout prolonged and pointed. The vertical plate is irregularly rhomboidal,
very broad in front, and pointed behind, where it is received by the occipital plates; the superior orbital is single, oblong, hexagonal, and larger above than below, and instead of projecting over the eye, is concave on its outer margin. The occipital plates are two in number, broad, and larger in front, with two temporals of variable shape. The frontal plates are irregularly hexagonal, with the longest border joined to the vertical and loral, with three articulating facets externally for the anterior orbital, loral and posterior nasal plates; the anterior frontal are quadrilateral, larger below and smaller above. The rostral plate is large, thick, and sub-rhomboidal, with its summit prolonged and acuminated; the nasal plates are double, the anterior quadrilateral, the posterior pentagonal, with the nostril between them—the posterior is joined to the orbit by a large square plate. The loral plate is large and of pentagonal form; the posterior orbital are two in number, quadrilateral, and nearly of equal size. There are six large irregularly quadrilateral labial plates on each side of the upper jaw, the second and third of which form the inferior walls of the orbit of the eye.

The nostrils are lateral, and at a distance from the snout. The eyes are small; the pupil black, with the iris reddish-grey. The neck is not at all contracted. The body is elongated, cylindrical, and covered with smooth scales, and with broad plates below. The tail is short, thick, and pointed at its extremity.

Colour. The anterior part of the head is yellow, with a transverse black band just behind the orbits of the eye. The body, at first view, seems bright vermillion, marked with transverse black rings, placed in pairs, but separated from each other by a yellow ring; yet, if examined attentively, there will be found about twenty ovoid, beautiful crimson spots, each spot surrounded with a black border, and separated from the adjacent spots in front and behind by a transverse yellow band: at the extremity of each of these yellow bands is placed a dusky sub-round spot, often indistinct, making a lateral series alternating with the vertebral row. The throat and abdomen are beautiful silver-white.
Dimensions. Length of head, 6 lines; breadth of head, 6 lines; length of body, 17 inches; length of tail, 3 inches; total length, 24 inches.

Habits. The Scarlet Snake is very timid, and lives most of its time in concealment; seldom does it move abroad unless disturbed, or in search of its food, which is the various kinds of crickets, grasshoppers, &c.

Geographical Distribution. The range of the Coluber coccineus is very limited. As yet I can only give, with certainty, from lat. 34°, in the Atlantic states, to the Gulf of Mexico.

General Remarks. The first account of this serpent may be seen in Lichtenstein and Voigt’s Magazin;* it is very accurate, and was furnished by Blumenbach. Gmelin copied it in his edition of the Systema Nature of Linnaeus, and Dr. Garden is given as authority for the locality of the animal.

Daudin next gave not only a full and accurate description of the Rhinostoma coccineus, but he accompanied it with an excellent figure. The “Coulèvre écarlate” (Scarlet Snake) of Bosc† is quite another animal, doubtless the Calamaria elapsoidea, as both his description, as well as his plate, represent it as entirely surrounded with black bands, while in the Rhinostoma coccineus the whole abdomen is of beautiful silver-white.

I cannot, by any means, agree with Schlegel, the distinguished ophidiologist, in placing this serpent among the Heterodontes, because it differs from them in so many particulars. The Rhinostoma has the head small, short, and not dilatable at will. In the Heterodon it is broad, flat, triangular and dilatable. In one the body is sub-cylindrical, and always of the same size; in the other it is always more or less depressed, and can be flattened extremely.

The rostral plate, though prolonged in both, is of very different form, and is carinated above in Heterodon, and not in Rhinostoma; even in their teeth they are not much more allied to Heterodon than to Tropidonotus. The posterior large palatine teeth are much more erect here than in either of those genera.

In short, then, their whole "physionomie" in life is different. The small head—the slightly projecting superior orbital plates—the small eyes—give the Rhinostoma coccinea a mild and placid look, which really appertains to its character; while the broad, flattened head—the projecting superior orbital plates, like the Crotaloidea, gives an Heterodon the look of a bold, blustering fellow, as he is.

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