

within a fraction of an inch can be taken by two persons using a tape measure.

Such rapid growth made me reflect on the place of a python in the home and exactly how long a python has to be before it wears out even the welcome of a herpetologist. Uncertainties were involved, because the growth rate of Indian pythons is not known. Would our Burmese reptile continue its rapid growth for years and, let us say, by 1950 attain a length of fifteen feet and a weight of 150 pounds? And what about that increasing appetite? Being cold blooded, snakes require little food and infrequent meals. Our pet had been put on a diet of a few mice or a small rat a week. This meant that rats had to be raised, and so a colony of the hooded variety was started by autumn when the snake's length had increased to 61 inches and its weight had reached 3 pounds 8 ounces.

After the python shed its skin, the gorgeous pattern caused even snake haters to exclaim, for then the iridescence of the scales added a splendor that defies description. On one occasion during the summer, our prize had stolen the show by causing guests to desert a birthday party for the company of the python. The inevitable embarrassment was one of those unforeseen difficulties of raising pythons in the home.

HOUSEBROKEN, TOO

On February 2, 1947, at the approximate age of eighteen months, this snake had a length of 72.5 inches, a girth of 7.21 inches, and a weight of 6 pounds 6 ounces; it constricted and devoured a large, dead, hooded rat in fourteen minutes. Sometimes captive reptiles get the worst of a battle with a rat, apparently because life in confinement has robbed them of part of their natural aggressiveness. Like other snakes, the python swallows all of its food whole, being unable to chew or tear it apart. This way of eating makes the snake one of the cleanest of eaters; ours had also become housebroken in a sense, but that is extremely unusual.

Coincident with evolving a long body and losing the limbs, the snake has acquired an expansible gape and jaws that work like a shuttle. The skin is so elastic and the jaws so loosely joined together and to the rest of the skull that the mouth can be stretched over a huge object with a diameter several times that of the head. The right and left jaws are alternately moved forward, allowing the inwardly curved teeth to grip the prey. Thus the snake literally pulls itself over the object, much as a housewife gets a pillowcase on a pillow by pulling it first here and then there. If the pillowcase got itself on without the help of the housewife, the simile would be perfect.

Once the meal enters the python's throat, muscles of the gullet and ribs co-operate to force the object along with surprising speed. It is the start that takes most of the time, although, when the reptile has tried to

swallow something with a diameter several times that of its own head, many periods of rest are necessary. During these, the windpipe with its heavily reinforced walls is shoved out to the tip of the lower jaw and the lungs filled with fresh air.

The chain of events that began in Burma with a python, a sugar barrel, and some alarmed men is thus stretching halfway around the world to an end nobody can foresee. If this python survives, he may answer some of those puzzling questions. It is certain that he will also create problems. Try to picture, if you can, a twenty-foot snake, no matter how docile, comfortably coiled by your furnace!

CHINA HAD TALKING MOVIES AS EARLY AS 100 B.C.

More than a hundred years before the beginning of the Christian era, a form of talking motion picture plays originated in China, and it has continued in popularity down to the present day, despite the advances of modern cinematography. This type of entertainment is the ancient Chinese shadow-play, which anticipated the talking pictures of our time by having concealed readers to produce voice effects. Collections of the figures used in the action of these early moving pictures, obtained by various Museum expeditions in past years, form an interesting part of the exhibits in Hall 32, of which a large section is devoted to this and other forms of Oriental theatricals. The Museum also has examples of the screen and other equipment used for the projection of shadow plays.

The history of shadow-plays, and details of their production were traced by the late Dr. Berthold Laufer, former Curator of Anthropology who was leader of the Museum's expeditions to China. The scenarios used for the shadow-plays are derived from the literary drama of the legitimate stage, and they, with marionette shows, constitute the most popular theatrical pastimes of the Chinese. The reader, "in the wings," recites the words of the plot as the figures perform the action. The special appeal to popular taste lies in the fact that the words are recited in the living vernacular, while until quite recently the repertoire of the legitimate stage of China employed the literary language, which was intelligible only to a limited educated group.

The acting figures in the shadow-plays are flat and ingeniously cut out of parchment, usually ox or sheep skin, evenly colored and varnished on both sides. When held against the light they are transparent. A screen of white gauze lighted by means of oil lamps from behind, is stretched between two poles. The figures, held by wires stuck into bamboo or reed handles, are skilfully manipulated behind the screen upon which their silhouettes are cast. Head, arms, and legs are cut out separately and

hinged to the body, so that great agility of motion is assured. The shadow plays have an advantage over the Chinese legitimate stage which now, like the English stage in Shakespeare's time, is almost lacking in scenery, while in the picture plays the sea, clouds, rivers, gardens, mountains, palaces, temples, courts, and boats, as well as gods, demons and monsters, are all most excellently represented.

The performance is always accompanied by a small orchestra, while the various roles are recited by the operator behind the curtain. The plots are taken from Buddhist and Taoist lore, or incidents in the history of China. The shadow plays excel in comic or satiric subjects; their wit is aimed at human weaknesses, official corruption, and social and political evils.

The shadow play was originally of a religious character, and only gradually assumed the function of mere entertainment. It is without doubt, according to Dr. Laufer's researches, indigenous to China, whence it spread to the Persians, Arabs, Turks, and other peoples, finally reaching Europe. The first mention made of it is in historical annals relating to the year 121 B.C. The historian narrates an anecdote of Wu-ti, an emperor, who lost one of his favorite wives and was obsessed by a great desire to see her again. A magician appeared at court who was able to throw her shadow on a transparent screen. The story is symbolic of the general idea underlying the early shadow performances—the shadow figures were regarded as souls of the departed, summoned back into the world by professional magicians.

NEW MEMBERS

The following persons became Members of the Museum during the period from February 17 to March 15:

Associate Members

Harry Z. Perel, Frank C. Rathje, John Roggenkamp, Nathan Rosenstone.

Annual Members

Miss Carmen Aguinaldo, Robert J. Aitchison, Frederick W. Alger, John F. Barron, J. Algert Baukus, Ferrel M. Bean, Arnon N. Benson, Louis G. Berman, Mrs. James A. Cathcart, Dante Chimenti, D. A. Conroy, Ernest F. Corey, Dr. Francis M. Crage, Harry E. Davis, Milburn L. Forth, Robert R. Glenn, Otto W. Goes, Earl H. Graff, Mrs. Robert W. Hamill, George A. Hamm, Adam Hefner, Paul S. Hein, Robert E. Levin, Edward H. Loevenhart, Richard M. Loewenstein, N. S. Mackie, Maurice Mandeville, Lynn L. Mathewson, Edward L. Miller, W. S. Miller, Mrs. Norman G. Parry, Mrs. Harold M. Pond, Philip Rootberg, James V. Sallemi, Edward G. Sandrok, Mario M. Sciaky, Donald K. Searles, A. G. Shennan, Robert Philip Shepard, Robert W. Smick, Saul Stone, Mrs. William H. Tomhave, Mrs. Frank H. Towner, Mrs. Paula H. Townley, D. H. Voltz, Dr. Eugene L. Walsh.



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