

## ENTOMOLOGY.

## WORM-SNAKES AND SNAKE-WORMS.

Upon rare occasions and at long intervals, the field-naturalist in his rambles comes across a strange grayish old-rope-like object lying on the ground but moving forward very slowly and bearing a remarkable resemblance to some strange kind of snake. These are known as "worm-snakes" and are made up of myriads of the grayish or leaden-coloured larvæ called "snake-worms" which are the maggots of certain gnats belonging to the genus *Sciara*. These gnats are superficially somewhat like mosquitoes but have much more conspicuous antennæ, and have also the important difference of habit that they do not bite. The maggots of several kinds of these gnats have gregarious habits and some may be found in dense masses under the bark of trees. When full-grown the snake-worms are about  $\frac{3}{8}$  of an inch long and a little thicker than an ordinary pin, of a dirty white colour, tapering slightly to each end and with a tiny black shining head. When about to change to the pupa state, they congregate in vast numbers, form processions and migrate, sometimes long distances, in search of a suitable place to complete their transformations.

The following interesting account of one of these curious migrations is written by our correspondent, Mr. T. N. Willing, of Sylvan Glade, Olds, Alberta: "While at Prince Albert on the 20th of July last, my attention was called to a very strange sight. At first glance it appeared like a snake about five feet long, which tapered from the head to the tail and moved slowly along the ground. Upon closer examination this rope-like object proved to be composed of a vast number of whitish larvæ, of which I am sending you some samples in alcohol. These larvæ had moved in a body about 30 feet from where their trail was first seen, issuing from underneath a wood pile. They all kept together in the form of a snake, the head being about half an inch thick, one and a half inches wide, and two inches long. From this head the body tapered from one inch wide down to a single larva. Upon drawing a stick across the body of this snake of worms, so as to scatter them, they immediately closed up again and completed the continuity of the mass. I enquired the next day what had become of



this curious object and was told that the larvæ had been killed by covering them with salt."

There are accounts of these curious aggregations of larvæ in many American and European publications (*e. g. Insect Life*, iv, p. 215). In Europe, worm-snakes have been recorded which were 4 or 5 inches wide and from 10 to 12 feet long. Most of the American accounts (which may perhaps seem strange to some !) describe as a rule worm-snakes much more moderate in proportions, viz. from 3 to 6 feet in length by from 1 to 3 inches wide. Upon one occasion only have I seen one of these worm-snakes. This was some miles from Nepigon, north of Lake Superior, in the month of August. The snake was about 4 feet long, about an inch wide and with a large expansion about one third of the length from the head. I had no convenience at the time to preserve the larvæ alive so as to identify the species. It is probable that several species of *Sciara* have this strange habit but I am not aware that anyone has ever reared to maturity and published the name of the American species. Unfortunately most people who have the opportunity, like those who put salt on the larvæ seen by Mr. Willing, are much more likely to practise the stupid habit of destroying everything they do not quite understand instead of trying to learn a little more about it.

J. FLETCHER.

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Among the latest contributions to the Herbarium of the Normal School is a very beautiful collection of 100 mounted Botanical specimens illustrating the flora of the Rocky Mountains in the vicinity of Banff, presented to the herbarium by Dr. Jas. Fletcher. The Normal School herbarium already contains a fine series of the plants of the vicinity of Ottawa, and this latest contribution not only adds greatly to the value of the herbarium, but these western plants will enable students to compare eastern with western forms in the same genera.

S. B. S.



Fletcher, James. 1899. "Worm-Snakes and Snake-Worms." *The Ottawa naturalist* 13(7), 172–173.

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