

This plant was collected on a very dry and sunny bank near Cassel, parasitical on *Anthemis Cotula*, *Barkhausia fætida*, *Sonchus asper*, *Galium verum*, *Torilis nodosa*, &c., sometimes twining round them and adhering by lateral tubercles like *C. Europæa*, and at others lying detached in dense yellow masses on the ground. It is distinguished by its pedunculated flowers and capitate stigmas from all the other German *Cuscutas*. On referring to Dietrich's 'Synopsis' (1840), Dr. Pfeiffer found the characters of *C. Americana*, Pers., to come pretty near to it, but to differ in the umbellate flowers. From the Bengal *C. sulcata*, Roxb., it is distinguished by the absence of the furrows in the calyx, &c. The orange-yellow colour of the stems renders it very conspicuous when growing in any quantity — A. HENFREY.

Observations on the Habits of the Python Natalensis. By Thomas S. Savage, M.D., of Cape Palmas, Western Africa.

This serpent, when spoken of by travellers and residents, has been erroneously called 'Boa,' and thus confounded with the South American genus. There is a striking similarity, however, between the two, both in structure and habits, so that were it not for the arrangement of the subcaudal scales, one would be identified with the other.

During my residence here, which has been five years, I have seen a number of individuals of the serpent, but one however alive, which is the specimen I now send.

The first of which I had any authentic account was one that appeared on the Mission premises of the A. B. C. F. Missions. The facts in the case have been kindly furnished by my friend the Rev. J. L. Wilson. He informed me that it was attracted into the yard by a dog. He says in answer to my inquiries, "He was 14 feet long, and held the dog not more than two minutes before the natives came to his relief. I suppose that the snake had stretched himself across the path, and seized the dog in the act of jumping over him. I was too much frightened to observe what was the shape of the snake while he held the dog in his folds. I am inclined to think that he had nothing to fasten his tail to while he held the dog. None of the bones of the dog were broken, and I am inclined to think that he received no injury whatever.

"The snake did not let go his hold till he had received a fatal blow from a bill-hook. The dog then leaped up suddenly several times, as if he were not sure of having been extricated, ran around and entered the back-yard, but for some time appeared afraid of everything and everybody. His back only was *slimed*, and this could not be washed off, but gradually wore away in the course of a week or ten days."

The next individual of which I have heard was attracted into the house of a colonist, an old woman, by a hen and her chickens. An unusual noise was heard under the bed in the night, which awakened the woman. By a light she discovered the serpent in the act of seizing its prey; affrighted, she fled to the house of a neighbour, who came and captured him with his gun.

The third individual appeared upon my own premises early in 1837. An antelope was discovered by some workmen a short distance from

my house. Upon the first sight, the natives as usual raised a cry, when he suddenly disappeared among the bushes. They started in pursuit. But a few moments elapsed before they heard a cry from the antelope, which directed them to the spot, where they beheld the animal struggling in the folds of a large Python. They all fired simultaneously, and shot at the same instant both the serpent and its victim. The former I measured, and found it over 14 feet. The antelope was a large one, and it was difficult to believe that it could have been received through the throat of the serpent, comparatively so small. The head had been cut off and the body greatly mutilated before I saw it; but taking a section of the skin where the abdomen begins to expand above the vent, and not including the greatest volume, I stretched it moderately. It was very easily distended; and I soon satisfied myself, that without going beyond the natural power of expansion, it would have taken the body of the antelope.

It was skinned by the natives, and the flesh when denuded was of the most delicate white. It was divided among them, and not a particle, whether of skin or any other part, was lost. All was carried home, cooked and eaten. From the skin was made a soup. I was extremely disgusted at the sight of a man carrying off in his hand, with an air of great satisfaction, a string of the intestines. This and other serpents are eagerly sought by the natives for food.

I have seen two other individuals in the course of the present year: they were captured by natives who were clearing up their land for rice-farms. They were much mutilated by transverse gashes from these "bill-hooks." Three more, I was informed, were found upon the same piece of land, which led the individual to abandon it, from the superstitious notion that it could not yield a crop.

The next specimen is the one before me. It measured 10 feet in length, is young, and was captured on the 22nd of February by my associate, the Rev. Joshua Smith, on the premises of one of our *out-stations*. His account, in answer to my inquiries, is as follows: "I had retired for the night, but was wakeful and unable to get to sleep. About twelve o'clock I heard Fanny (a favourite dog) barking violently in the girls' school-house. The barking soon ended in a cry of distress. I thought it probable that a leopard had attacked her, as they often do carry off dogs and other domestic animals. I went down and walked around the house where there was a hole, affording Fanny ingress and egress. The moon shone brightly, but I could not see the cause of trouble, nor hear any noise. I called the dog by name, but she did not appear, nor could I hear anything except what I thought to be the hiss of some ducks that were shut up there. I opened the door, but still I could see nothing. I then went back to my chamber for a lantern, and returning opened again the door, when I discovered the dog in the folds of a serpent with her back downwards, and seemingly motionless. I went back to my chamber for a weapon, and finding only a country dagger, I returned accompanied by some men, and entered the school-house again with the lantern in my hand. The serpent was coiled twice or thrice around the dog, his tail grasping the foot of a bench, and his jaws fastened on her throat. His motion in compressing his prey may be compared to that of a cord when tightened around anything, and some one pulling first at

one end and then at the other. I thought it best to thrust the dagger into the snake as near the head as possible ; but as that was hidden by the bench I could not see it, and I made a thrust through the lungs. It started and Fanny was thrown from its folds with a jerk, when its aim was to retreat by the way it had entered. I then withdrew the dagger and thrust it into the snake further back, so as to hold him till the men on the outside could disable him. As his head appeared they beat him with sticks, so as to prevent him from running away entirely."

To the above I will add, that Mr. Smith displayed great fearlessness on the occasion ; for though there were on the spot a number of men, both colonists and natives, yet not one could be induced to follow him into the house. An attack from the serpent might have been apprehended, for he was evidently in a state of extreme hunger.

The general habit of this serpent in seeking for its prey is to lie in ambush near a frequented path or watering-place, and suspended from a tree, or with its tail fixed to some other object, suddenly dart upon the unwary animal. The attack is so sudden and violent that the victim is often prostrated and stunned, and then begins the dreadful process of constriction. A bullock was so much injured in a recent attack, as to be supposed beyond the possibility of recovery.

In making the onset, it is not always necessary that the tail should be coiled around a fixed object. The hooks or claws near the anus are sometimes protruded, it is said (and the evidence is wholly satisfactory), and inserted in the ground or under roots, thus affording a fulcrum which gives inconceivable force to the blow.

These horny processes, or rudimental feet as they have been called, are also serviceable in ascending trees : they are inserted into the ground and bark of the tree, constituting fixed points, which greatly facilitate the ascent. We have satisfactory testimony in proof of another habit that I have never seen mentioned, in which these hooks must be highly serviceable. It is said, that in fields more or less open they often raise their heads above the surrounding grass and shrubbery in search of prey ; their application then in this act must be evident ; protruded and penetrating the ground beneath the roots, they must afford great support to the body. In this position birds have been known to attempt to alight, mistaking it, in its motionless attitude, for a stick or stump, and thus to have fallen unwarily into its distended jaws.

Instances of its attack upon men are very rare, and never, probably, except when it is in a state of extreme hunger.

The natives fear them single-handed, but not in numbers. They seek them for food, esteeming them very highly on their *bill of fare*.

Its places of resort are streams and damp places. Almost all animals constitute its prey. It is not poisonous, as is well known. Its constrictive power is all that renders it formidable.—*From the Boston (U. S.) Journ. of Nat. Hist.* vol. iv. No. 2.

ON THE PLACE OF ISOETES IN THE SYSTEM.

Following the opinion of C. Richard, M. Bory de St. Vincent considers that the Linnæan genus *Isoëtes* has such distinct characters that it must be regarded as a natural family ; to this it has been ob-



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