

## SOME OF OUR COMMON SNAKES.—II.

BY ARTHUR RUSMISSELLE MILLER SPAID.—PHOTOGRAPHS FROM NATURE BY THE AUTHOR.

(Concluded from page 353.)

Of the non-venomous snakes, the "racer" and "pilot" snake, indiscriminately called blacksnakes, are considered beneficial, especially the former, by a few agriculturists, on account of their well-known habits of destroying beetles and vermin, while their equally well-established habits, especially of the latter, of robbing birds' nests of eggs and young, places the ban on them with the majority of farmers. It is also claimed that blacksnakes will chase human beings, and even squeeze the life out of anyone so unfortunate as to be overtaken by one of these terrible serpents. The truth of the matter is, both do occasionally make a fine display of courage, provided they are facing a coward, although the racer usually turns tail and runs away more swiftly than any other ophidian can. The pilotsnake or mountain blacksnake is less likely to show fight, being rather clumsy, but it too knows how to frighten the timid. With its long body thrown into graceful curves and its mouth open, it does seem formidable to anyone who may not know its harmless disposition.

With a small dog whose fighting qualities consist principally of loud barking and a vigorous wagging of the tail, a large mountain blacksnake makes an interesting little fight. But the encounter is generally

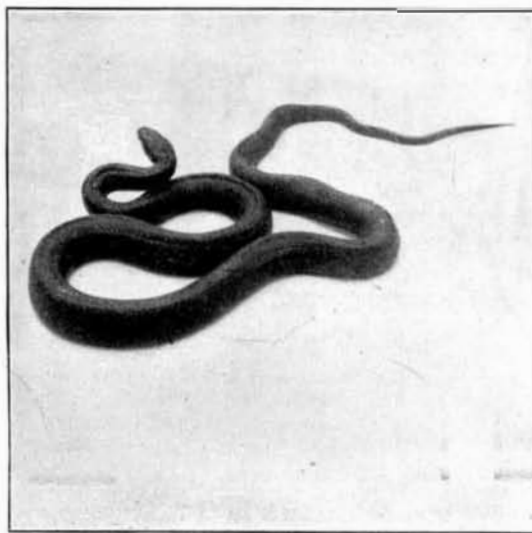
time I witnessed a pair of catbirds making a bold defense against a blacksnake bent on devouring the contents of their nest. At first the snake was inclined to disregard the distressed birds as they fought to drive it away, but the blows of their wings and bills became so annoying that the thief had to seek refuge in flight. On reaching the roots of a tree from which the river had washed the dirt, the snake started to climb, only to be driven beneath them, and then out to an old stump, under which the baffled and beaten reptile took refuge. In coming down a tree these arboreal serpents make the same careful selection of every point of vantage in the unevenness of the bark as when ascending.

Other snakes climb, too. Rattlesnakes and copperheads crawl upon fences to watch for their prey. The greensnake spends a great deal of time among the branches of low bushes, gliding among them as rapidly as a snake on the ground. The milksnake or housesnake has a reputation for climbing about buildings, and may be found in the barn, granary, cellar, or house. A friend of mine found one nicely coiled on the mantelpiece of his sitting room last summer. They mean no harm by their familiarity. In fact, they belong to the class of beneficial reptiles, and catch as many mice as the blacksnakes, if not more; but like them they will occasionally rob a bird's nest. Their ability to climb is marvelous. They can easily crawl around on the rim of a flour barrel, or turn around

known in many localities, they are perhaps too rare to be classed with our common snakes, yet this article would not be complete without giving them a passing word. The venom of the copperhead is not so fatal as that of the rattlesnake, the bite of the latter being fatal in many instances. The rattlesnake grows to be five or six feet in length, while a copperhead over three feet long is considered large. Like the rattlesnake, it seems to be most active during the night, lying coiled up during the day. The "snake tracks" made across dusty roads during the night are in many instances those of the pit vipers. In the evening, when they come from their hiding places, they are very active. The copperhead has a horny tip on its tail, the top of the head is a bright copper color, and its tongue is reddish, while the tongues of other snakes are black. The neck is slender, and the head is triangular. It has a very irritable disposition. The rattlesnake is easily distinguished by the rattle, whose warning sound has saved many a person from imminent danger. The rattle does not indicate, as is popularly supposed, the age of the snake, for instead of the rings or sections numbering the years, they show only the number of times the snake has shed its skin, which may be as many as four in one year. The snake holds the rattle in a position to sound a warning, which in some cases is outside of the coil. Fortunately for man and beast, our two representatives of the pit vipers are not aggressive in their attacks, and are not able



Blacksnakes 5 Feet Long Climbing a Locust Tree.



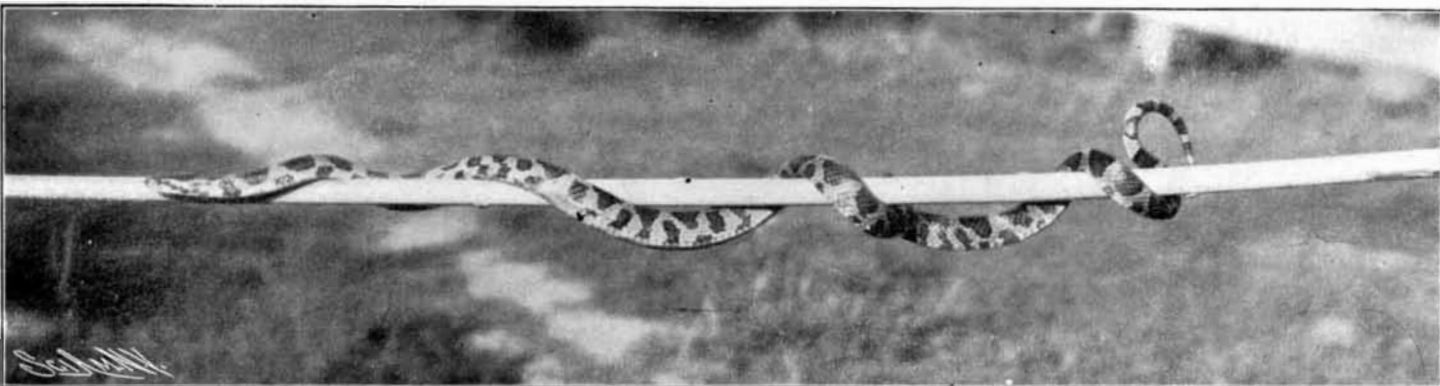
A Mountain Blacksnake Ready to Fight.



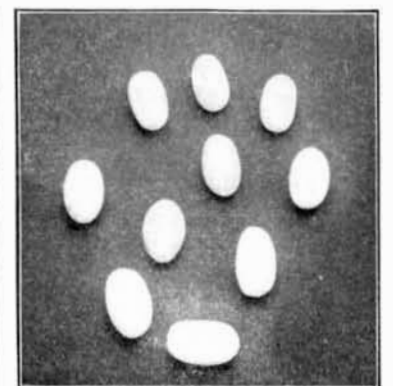
A Banded Rattlesnake Coiled to Strike.



A 5-Foot Mountain Blacksnake Fighting a Dog.



A Milksnake Crawling Along a Cane.



Eggs of the Mountain Blacksnake.

## SOME OF OUR COMMON SNAKES.

of short duration, for the moment the dog can be induced to pinch the snake a little, the clumsy reptile loses all courage and, like a coward, thinks of nothing but running away. It will be seen, therefore, that the blacksnakes are not only harmless, but cowardly as well. No one who has ever stood on a blacksnake's head and felt its tightening coils around his leg before cutting its head off with his pocket knife will be afraid of losing his life by its constrictions, the way people suppose the blacksnake makes its attack. The blacksnake is, nevertheless, strong, and in climbing a tree makes a fine display of its many muscles. The cartilage-tipped ribs are movably articulated to a great number of vertebrae, and by pushing them into the depressions of the trunk and crevices of the bark, and bending its body into short curves, the snake ascends the tree quickly without any apparent effort. To dislodge it is next to impossible without rough handling.

On one occasion I saw a racer, the only true blacksnake, go up the body of an ironwood and glide swiftly through its branches, which hung over a small stream. I have observed others lying on the fence or on bushes, either looking for prey or taking a sunbath. While setting up my camera in front of a chickadee's nest, I discovered by mere accident a blacksnake lying on a branch of a white pine top a few feet away, either enjoying a sunbath or watching for the chickadees, the parent birds frequently alighting in the old pine top on their way to and from the nest. At another

on a walking stick held out horizontally. I had a specimen that could crawl from one object to another over the varnished surface of a walking stick whose diameter was smaller than that of the snake. The housesnake when discovered on the ground frequently assumes an attitude of attack. Throwing its body into a few curves, it draws back its head in a threatening manner, vibrating its tail just as nearly all of our snakes do under such circumstances. Its efforts to strike, however, are feeble, and its slender head proves to the observer at a glance that the reptile is harmless.

The copperhead and rattlesnake bring forth their young alive, eight or nine in number. The garter-snake also produces a large number of young, while the most of our common snakes lay eggs, from which the young hatch in due time.

Snakes have no eyelids, but their eyes are protected by the transparent skin which covers them. When the time for exuviation arrives, the skin which covers the eye like the crystal of a watch comes off with the rest. But for some days before this interesting process takes place, the eye has a bluish white appearance, and some persons claim that the snake is blind. This, however, is not true. The snake can see, but it evidently looks through a "glass darkly" until the old skin comes off, revealing the clear eye beneath. While the sight is thus impaired, the snake is very irritable.

Although the copperhead and rattlesnake are well

to strike more than one-third the length of their bodies.

## A Cretan Museum.

Dr. Arthur Evans has ceased, for the time, his great labors in Crete, whereby he is entirely reconstructing what is, to us westerners, the most important epoch in history. The question has been asked, Where are his treasures to be stored? and many who saw his exhibition at Burlington House last winter have hoped that some of them might find their way, considering Dr. Evans's nationality, to the British Museum. It is now reported from Munich, however, that the foundation stone of a Cretan museum has been laid in Candia, wherein there will be stored all the priceless antiquities which have already rewarded Dr. Evans for his spadework in Knossos. Remembering the shame of the Elgin marbles, we can only say that this is well. Crete, to which we owe a debt that is as yet inestimable, is surely entitled to the possession of those great beginnings of fine art and those significant clay tablets with which she initiated European history three thousand five hundred years ago.

One thousand rare plants from Mexico that will constitute a part of the Mexican exhibit at the World's Fair are *en route*. They will be placed in hothouses and transplanted in the gardens around the Mexican pavilion next spring.