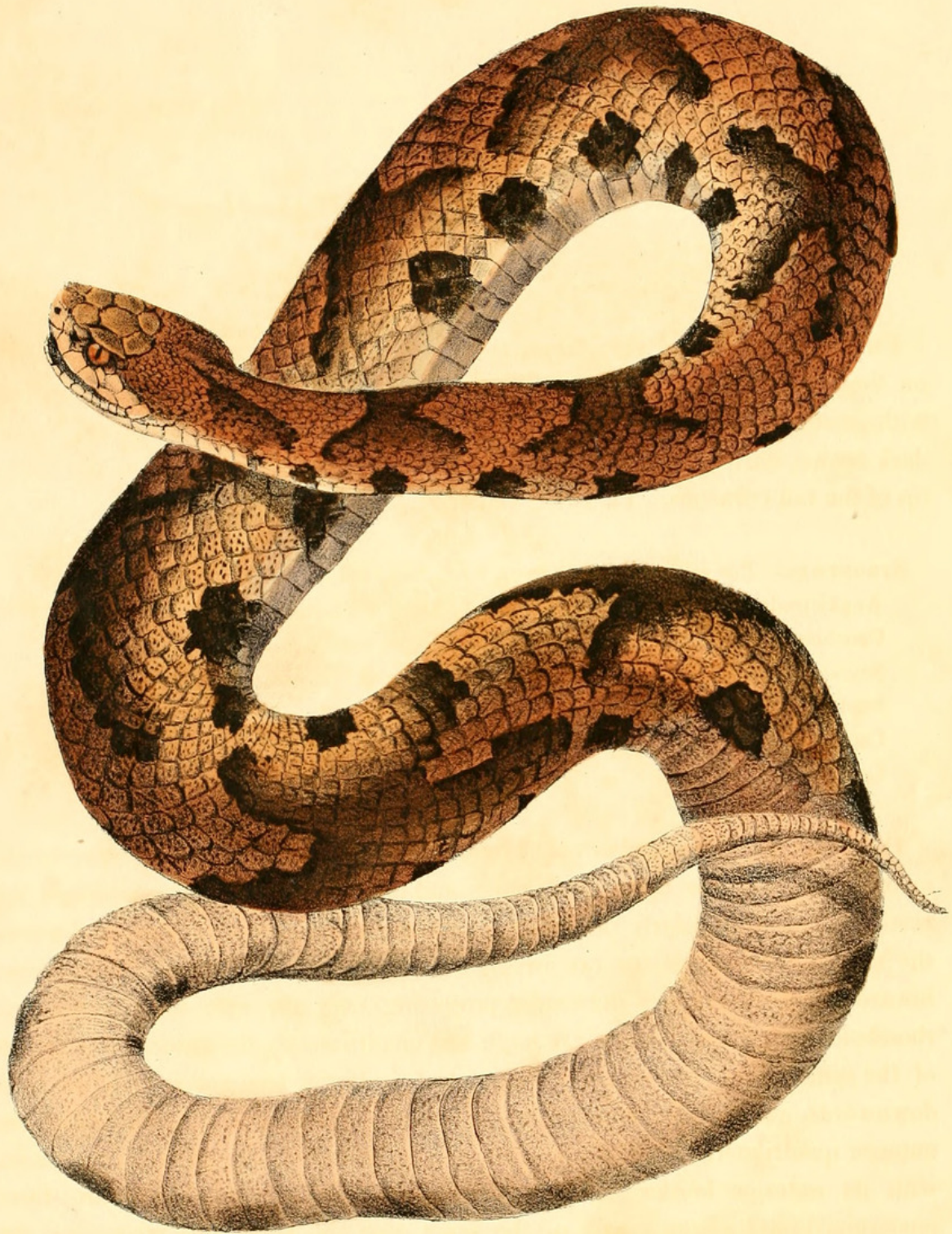




Trigonocephalus Contortix.

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TRIGONOCEPHALUS CONTORTRIX.—*Linnæus*.*Plate VIII.*

CHARACTERS. Head very large, triangular, covered with plates in front, and on the vertex, with scales behind; a pit between the eye and nostril; upper jaw with poisonous fangs; body thick, light hazel-nut brown, with transverse bars of dark brown, narrowest on the mesial line, broader and bifurcating on the flanks; tip of the tail corneous. Pl. 150. Caud. Pl. 42. Sc. 4.

SYNONYMES. *Boa contortrix*, *Linnæus*, Syst. Nat., vol. i. p. 373.

Angkistrodon mokeson, *Beauvais*, Trans. Amer. Phil. Soc., vol. iv. p. 381.

Cenchris mokeson, *Daudin*, Hist. Nat. des Rept., tom. v. p. 358, pl. xl. fig. 3.

Scytalus cupreus, *Rafinesque*, Am. Journ. Arts and Sci., vol. i. p. 85.

Scytalus cupreus, *Harlan*, Med. and Phys. Res., p. 130.

Cenchris mokeson, *Harlan*, Med. and Phys. Res., p. 128.

Copperhead, *Vulgo*.

DESCRIPTION. The head is very large, triangular, and broadest posteriorly; the mouth large, with the upper jaw strong, and furnished with poisonous fangs; the vertical plate is regularly pentagonal, with an acute angle directed backwards; the superior orbital plates are irregularly triangular, with their apices turned inwards, and their bases outwards, projecting over the eye; the occipital are rhomboidal; the frontal plates are large and quadrilateral; the anterior frontal are of the same form, but smaller; the rostral is large, triangular, with its basis downwards, and its apex upwards and truncate. There are two nasal plates, the anterior quadrilateral, with its posterior margin hollowed; the posterior trapezoid, with its anterior border lunated to complete the nostril. There are three posterior orbital plates nearly of the same size, the upper one triangular; the

inferior orbital plate is single, long, narrow and semicircular; there are two anterior orbital, the upper quadrilateral, the lower makes the superior wall of the pit between the eye and the nostril, which is completed below by the second labial plate, and by a small plate that rests on the third labial. The margin of the upper jaw is covered with seven quadrilateral plates.

The nostrils are large, lateral, and placed near the snout. The eyes are large, but do not at first appear so from the projection of the superior orbital plates; the pupil is elliptical, vertical and dark; the iris bright golden, with a tinge of red. The neck is greatly contracted and covered with smooth scales; the body is elongated, but thick to near the tail, and is covered above with rhomboidal scales, carinated, except those of the lower rows, which are smooth and larger. The abdomen is covered with plates, the last one of which is very large; the tail is short, thick, conical, and ends in a horny tip.

COLOUR. The head is a delicate light hazel-nut brown above, with the labial plates whitish; the ground colour of the whole animal, neck, body and tail, is of the same delicate hue, lighter on the sides, where the scales are beautifully freckled with small dark spots. Behind the occiput begins a series of transverse bars of dark brown, continued to near the extremity of the tail; these bars are contracted along the vertebral line, but are broader and bifurcated on the flanks. These bars are lightest on the back, darker at the sides, with their anterior and posterior margins bordered with brown. The under surface of the whole animal is flesh coloured, freckled with minute points of dark brown, and a series of sub-round dark coloured spots on the abdominal plates near their extremities; these ascend to include a scale or two on the flanks, and are so disposed that one spot corresponds to the point of bifurcation of the transverse dorsal bars, and another to the space between them; all these spots terminate at the tail, which is flesh colour below.

DIMENSIONS. Length of head, 1 inch 2 lines; breadth of head, 11 lines; length of body, 21 inches; length of tail, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches; greatest circumference of body, $3\frac{1}{2}$

inches; circumference of the neck, 1 inch 10 lines. In the individual described, there were 150 abdominal plates, 42 sub-caudal, and four pairs of bifid plates or scales near the apex.

HABITS. The *Trigonocephalus* chooses dark and shady places for its residence in general, though at times it is found in meadows of high grass. Its usual food seems to be small birds and field mice, which I have more than once found in its stomach. In confinement it could never be made to take any food; though different small animals were offered, it would kill but never eat them.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION. The *Trigonocephalus contortrix* has an extended geographical range. I have received it from the western parts of New England to middle Florida inclusive, and from the shores of the Atlantic to the borders of the Alleghany mountains. As yet, I have no evidence of its existence in the valley of the Mississippi; its place is there probably supplied by the *Toxicophis* (*Trigonocephalus*) *atro-fuscus* of Troost, to which its habits are very similar.

GENERAL REMARKS. This animal was first described by Linnæus, in the twelfth edition of his *Systema Naturæ*, under the name *Boa contortrix*, and it ranges well under his genus *Boa*, which included those serpents, venomous or not, that had plates under the tail, as well as on the abdomen. The specimen from which he took his description, was sent him by Dr. Garden, and had, according to his account, the same number of plates as the animal here described, though he does not mention the two or three scales or bifid plates on the tail. He says furthermore, that he found the gland or sac for containing the venom, but that there were no fangs, which might have been the result of accident, as the larger fall out and are succeeded by others. It cannot be imagined why he should have given a reference to the Hog Nose of Catesby,* especially as this is far removed from his genus *Boa*, in having scales or bifid plates under the tail. The

* Cates., Carol., &c., vol. ii. pl. lvi.

reference to the *Coluber constrictor*, of the tenth edition of the *Systema Naturæ*, which is entirely a different animal from that of the twelfth, is very remarkable, as it corresponds with it neither in its character nor habits; of that he says, "maxillæ apex sinus triqueter, adoritur homines, circum pedes convolvens, sed innocuus," while this he is desirous to prove a poisonous animal, "caput latum, valde convexum, sacculos venenatos habet, sed tela non reperi."

Daudin, from some researches of Palisot de Beauvais, and from his own observations, makes this animal a new genus, *Cenchris*, saying at the same time that the Hog Nose of Catesby was synonymous with it, and that the Common Hog Nose is the *Boa contortrix*, in which he was mistaken. There are doubtless several species of Hog Nose snakes in the country, both at the north and south, but all are widely different from the *Boa contortrix* of the *Systema Naturæ*. Daudin's description of his *Cenchris mokeson* is good, and agrees well with the *Trigonocephalus contortrix*; "body thick; tail short and cylindrical; head large, covered with plates in front and scales behind; jaws with fangs." "The colour of the *Cenchris mokeson*," he says, "appears, from a drawing done from nature by Peale, the proprietor and director of the Philadelphia Museum, of a reddish-brown; the body and tail marked with fifteen large transverse dark bands; these are narrowest in the centre," (viz: along the vertebral line,) "and are broader and darker at the sides."

Cuvier is as wrong in referring the *Cenchris mokeson* of Daudin to the genus *Heterodon*,* as in saying that Daudin himself knew it only from the figure of the Hog Nose of Catesby, when in fact he had a very fair drawing furnished him by Peale, easily recognised by those acquainted with the animal; and besides this he has given two good figures on the same plate,† one the head of the Hog Nose, and the other the head of his *Mokeson*, shewing clearly that they belong to very different genera.

* *Regn. Anim.*, tom. ii. p. 62, note 2.

† *Hist. Nat. des Rept.*, tom. v. pl. xl., fig. 25, *Mokeson*; fig. 28, Hog Nose.



Holbrook, John Edwards. 1842. "Trigonocephalus contortrix – Linneaus." *North American herpetology; or, A description of the reptiles inhabiting the United States* 3, 39–42. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.326799>.

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