



Coluber punctatus.

On Stone by J. H. Richard.

F. S. Duvall, Lith. Phil^a

COLUBER PUNCTATUS.—*Linnæus*.*Plate XVIII.*

CHARACTERS. Head large, flattened; body above bluish-black; abdomen orange colour, with three longitudinal rows of spots; beneath the tail yellow, immaculate. Pl. 132. Sc. 49.

SYNONYMES. *Coluber punctatus*, *Linnæus*, Syst. Nat., vol. i. p. 376.

Little Black and Red Snake, *Edwards*, Glean. Nat. Hist., vol. iii. p. 289.

Another small snake, *Edwards*, Glean. Nat. Hist., vol. ii. p. 291.

La Ponctué, *Lacépède*, Hist. Nat. des Serp., tom. ii. p. 287.

Coluber punctatus, *Latreille*, Hist. Nat. des Rept., tom. iv. part ii. p. 136.

Coluber punctatus, *Gmelin*, Syst. Nat. Lin., vol. i. pars iii. p. 1089.

Coluber punctatus, *Daudin*, Hist. Nat. des Rept., tom. vii. p. 178.

Coluber torquatus, *Shaw*, Gen. Zool., vol. iii. p. 553.

Natrix punctatus, *Merrem*, Versuch eines Syst. der Amphib., p. 131, spec. 162.

Natrix Edwardsii, *Merrem*, Versuch eines Syst. der Amphib., p. 136, spec. 195.

Homolosoma punctata, *Wagler*, Natürlich. Syst. der Amphib., p. 191.

Spilotes punctatus, *Swainson*, Lard. Cyclop. Rept., p. 364.

Coluber punctatus, *Harlan*, Med. and Phys. Res., p. 117.

Calamaria punctata, *Schlegel*, Phys. des Serp., tom. ii. p. 39.

DESCRIPTION. The head is rather small, flattened, and rounded at the snout. The vertical plate is sub-triangular, with its basis forward and joined to the frontal; the superior orbital are quadrilateral and elongated, with their outer margins projecting but slightly. The occipital are irregularly triangular, broadest in front, and joined to the vertical, the superior orbital and superior posterior

orbital plates. The frontal plates are irregularly pentagonal, broadest within and smallest without, where they join a large and regularly quadrilateral loreal plate. The anterior frontal plates are two in number, and are smaller and quadrilateral in form. The rostral is triangular, with its basis below and its apex above, and rounded. There are two nasal plates; the anterior is quadrilateral, with its posterior margin incurvated, and the posterior pentagonal hollowed before for the nostril. The upper jaw is covered with eight large square plates, increasing in size to the angle of the mouth; two of these (the fourth and fifth) ascend to form the inferior wall of the orbit. There are two posterior orbital plates, the superior of which is the longer, and only one anterior orbital.

The nostrils are lateral and near the snout. The eyes are large, the pupil dark, the iris grey. The neck is contracted, and smaller than the head. The body is elongated, sub-cylindrical, rounded above, and covered with smooth scales; the abdomen is flattened, and covered with plates. The tail is delicate and pointed.

COLOUR. The head is of a greyish-black colour, with a transverse blotch of yellowish-white on each side of the occiput, uniting to form a ring; the lips are white. The upper surface of the body is the same colour as the head; but this varies a good deal—sometimes almost black, at others approaching a chestnut-brown, finely dotted with grey. The abdomen is reddish-yellow, with three parallel rows of dark spots of sub-triangular form, with their apices turned forward, one row of which runs in the mesial line. The tail is of similar colour with the body, both above and below, but wants the sub-triangular spots.

DIMENSIONS. Length of head, 5 lines; length of body, $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches; length of tail, 2 inches; circumference of body, 9 lines. In the individual here described there were 132 abdominal plates, and 49 sub-caudal scales. I have seen one 14 inches long.

HABITS. The *Coluber punctatus* is a very timid animal, living great part of the time concealed under the bark of trees, or old logs and stones. It emerges from

its hiding-place towards the dusk of evening, or after rain, when the insects on which it feeds have been washed from their hiding-places.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION. The *Coluber punctatus* inhabits the Atlantic states from Maine to Florida inclusive.

GENERAL REMARKS. The first notice of this animal is to be found in the *Gleanings of Natural History*, by George Edwards,* where may be seen an excellent plate of it. He says it was sent to him by his friend Bartram, from Pennsylvania; that "its upper side, except a white ring round the neck, is of shining jet black; the belly, or under part, is of a fine light red, and the eyes flame-colour." A second specimen was also sent him, the "upper side of which was chestnut-colour, and the under side deep yellow."†

Linnaeus next gave the characters very distinctly of this animal, from a specimen furnished him by Dr. Garden. Other naturalists only copied him, till Bosc observed it in Carolina, and communicated a very full description of it to Latreille, which was afterwards copied by Daudin.

Merrem, from the plate to which he refers in Edwards, being without the three longitudinal rows of dark spots that Linnaeus gives as one of the distinctive marks of his animal, as well as from its having a collar or ring, not mentioned in Linnaeus, thought it a new species, and called it after Edwards. Yet there is no doubt that the *Natrix punctatus* and the *Natrix Edwardsii* of Merrem are one and the same animal. Indeed, I have more than once seen individuals of this species without the rings at the neck, and as frequently without the spots; and Say has seen the central row double.

This serpent has been arranged in very different genera by different naturalists. Some have placed it in *Calamaria*; others in *Coronella*; others in *Homolosoma*;

* *Gleanings of Natural History*, vol. iii. p. 289.

† *Ibid.*, p. 290.

others in *Spilotes*. For the present I shall leave it in that of *Coluber*, where it was first placed by Linnæus, from the type of which it differs only in having the head a little shorter, though the plates are the same in number, and nearly in form, the neck a little less contracted, the tail shorter, &c., all of which might be useful in settling a species, but cannot determine a genus.



Holbrook, John Edwards. 1842. "Coluber punctatus – Linneaus." *North American herpetology; or, A description of the reptiles inhabiting the United States* 3, 81–84. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.326809>.

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