



Leptophis saurifus.

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LEPTOPHIS SAURITUS.—*Linnæus*.*Plate IV.*

CHARACTERS. Head oval, much elongated; snout prolonged, though rather rounded at the apex; body very long, slender; tail very long, thin, pointed at the tip; colour, above dusky brown, trilineate, vertebral line pale yellow, often tinged with green; lateral lines clouded yellowish-white; abdomen pale yellow, tinged with green, immaculate. Pl. 165–167. Sc. 117–121.

SYNONYMES. Riband Snake, *Catesby*, Carol., &c., vol. ii. p. 50, pl. 1.

Coluber saurita, *Linnæus*, Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 385.

Coluber saurita, *Gmelin*, Syst. Nat. Lin., tom. i. pars iii. p. 1109.

Le saurite, *Lacépède*, Hist. Nat. des Serp., tom. ii. p. 308.

Coluber saurita, *Latreille*, Hist. Nat. Rept., tom. iv. p. 178.

Coluber saurita, *Daudin*, Hist. Nat. des Rept., tom. vii. p. 104, pl. 81, fig. 2.

Coluber saurita, *Shaw*, Gen. Zool., vol. iii. part ii. p. 532.

Natrix saurita, *Merrem*, Versuch eines Syst. der Amph., p. 122.

Coluber proximus, *Say*, Long's Exped. to Rock. Mount., vol. i. p. 187.

Coluber saurita, *Fitzinger*, Neue Class der Rept., p. 53.

Coluber saurita, *Harlan*, Med. and Phys. Res., p. 115.

Coluber proximus, *Harlan*, loc. cit., p. 116.

Riband Snake at the south, Swift Garter Snake at the north, *Vulgo*.

DESCRIPTION. The head is ovoid, very long, and rather large in proportion to the body, with the snout somewhat prolonged, though rounded at its apex. The vertical plate is large, elongated, and hexagonal; the superior orbital are of equal length with the vertical, quadrilateral, narrow, broader behind, and projecting over the eye. The occipital are irregularly triangular, with all their angles

rounded, and are broadest before. The frontal plates are broad and pentagonal, broadest within, narrow without, where they descend to a small, quadrilateral, loreal plate; the anterior frontal are irregularly quadrilateral, narrow in front, with their posterior and external angles pointed and prolonged. The rostral plate is rather small and pentagonal; there are two nasal plates, the anterior of which is small and regularly quadrilateral; the posterior is also small, and irregularly pentagonal, and hollowed before for the nostril. The anterior orbital plate is single, very long, pentagonal, slightly curved behind, and ascending to the plane of the forehead; there are three small posterior orbital; and the inferior wall of the orbit is completed by the fourth and fifth superior labial, of which plates there are seven, all large: the anterior pentagonal; the second quadrilateral; the third, fourth and fifth pentagonal; the sixth again quadrilateral; and the seventh triangular.

The nostrils are near the snout, lateral, but open obliquely upwards. The eyes are of moderate size; the pupil is dusky, with the iris yellowish-grey and brilliant. The neck is contracted, much smaller than the head, and covered with small, hexagonal, carinated scales.

The body is very long, slender, and covered above with scales of similar form to those of the neck, but larger, all carinated, notched behind, and with plates below. The tail is very long, thin, and terminates in a point.

COLOUR. The head above is light olive-brown; the labial plates have a greenish-yellow tinge, marked at their place of union with a dusky line; each occipital plate is marked with a small yellow spot; this mark is, however, not constant: I have never seen it wanting in the southern animal, but it is not always found in the northern, and in some rare examples it is double: the large anterior orbital plate is olive in front, but its posterior half is yellow, which gives a peculiar physiognomy to the serpent.

The body above is dusky if seen at a distance, but if examined closely and in a

certain light appears to be brown, often tinged with olive, and marked with three longitudinal lines. The vertebral one begins between the occipital plates, is of pale greenish-yellow, and becomes obsolete an inch or two from the tail; this line occupies the vertebral scale, and the half of one scale on each side, and has a straight border throughout its whole extent. The lateral lines or bands are broader, more or less distinct, including two scales or more, with margins less regular; they are of dirty yellowish-white, tinged with green; on each side of these lines are dusky or black small rhomboidal spots, sometimes arranged in a row. The abdomen is shining milky white, with a tinge of green. The tail is coloured like the body, but the lateral lines only continue for a short distance behind the vent.

DIMENSIONS. Length of head 10 lines; length of body, 23 inches; length of tail, 12 inches: total length, 35 inches 10 lines. This animal at times reaches the length of nearly four feet; in general, however, they are found between two and three feet long. In the specimen here described, there were 165 abdominal plates, and 117 sub-caudal scales; but this number is by no means constant, as I have seen by comparing several animals—among others the following, now in the Museum of the Academy of Natural Sciences at Philadelphia:

1. A specimen from Missouri, given by Mr. Eckhart: abdominal plates, 156; sub-caudal scales, 121.—2. One from Pennsylvania, by Dr. Allison: abdominal plates, 150; sub-caudal scales, 112.—3. One from Delaware, by Dr. Green: abdominal plates, 156; sub-caudal scales, 93; tail imperfect.—4. One from Key West: abdominal plates, 160; sub-caudal scales, 125.—5. One from South Carolina: abdominal plates, 147; sub-caudal scales, 117.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION. The *Leptophis sauritus* has a wide range. I have seen it in most of the states from Maine to Georgia; and have received specimens from Louisiana, Arkansas and the far west; and, if I am correct in supposing this animal identical with the *Coluber proximus* of Say, which I doubt not, then does it reach the very foot of the Rocky Mountains. It only differs

from our animal, according to Say, "in the numerical proportion that its sub-caudal scales bear to its abdominal plates;" which is not sufficient of itself to distinguish animals so closely allied.

GENERAL REMARKS. The first account of this serpent may be seen in Catesby's History of Carolina, &c.; where it is figured and described under the name of Riband Snake; which it bears to the present time with us among all classes of people. Linnæus received it into the twelfth edition of the Systema Naturæ, and applied to it the specific name saurita, which has been universally adopted by naturalists; nor can there be a doubt of his meaning, for his only references are to Catesby and to Dr. Garden: although the number of sub-caudal scales he gives does not agree with my observations, yet this might have been the result of accident in the specimen that he examined.



Holbrook, John Edwards. 1842. "Leptophis sauritus – Linneaus." *North American herpetology; or, A description of the reptiles inhabiting the United States* 4, 21–24. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.326825>.

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