

## POISONOUS LIZARDS, THE BIS-COBRA.

*Editor's Note.*—In a letter to Mr. Phipson, Honorary Secretary to the Society, Mr. Ommanney, Under-Secretary to the Government of Bombay, states that in the official reports seven deaths in Guzerat are put down as having been caused by a poisonous lizard. He supposes this to be the much-discussed Bis-Cobra, and asks for information concerning it or any other poisonous lizard, if such a thing exists in this part of the world. Mr. Phipson replied that "all naturalists are of opinion that no such thing as a poisonous lizard exists in this country. The belief to the contrary is, however, prevalent in India amongst the ignorant classes in country districts, and is doubtless kept up by the snake-charmers and others whose interest it is to foster public credulity in such matters.

"The word Bis-Cobra is applied to a variety of lizards in different parts of the country, but in all cases where the reptiles have been pointed out by the natives and killed, and sent to museums, they have been at once identified as known species." He adds in a postscript "that according to the highest authority the only lizard the bite of which is known to be poisonous is the *Heloderma* of the S. W. States of America and Mexico." It is doubtful now whether the venom of the *Heloderma* is as powerful as has been reported. I believe no authentic case has been known of the death of a human being from its bite, though small animals suffer to a fatal extent. I have never seen any lizard in India like it; any sort of lizard may be a Bis-Cobra to a native. I once saw a whole *Kacheri* full of people put to flight by a common garden monitor. From what I remember of the *Heloderma* which was presented to the London Gardens by, I think, Sir John Lubbock, the nearest approach in form is our *Uromastix hardwickii*, only flatter, and yellow and black instead of earthy brown, the whole body covered with small tubercles; a very repulsive looking creature, and capable of giving a severe bite. I believe it killed some small animals: Guinea-pigs and the like. It arrived in a tin box long and narrow, and when this was opened at the end it would not come out, but planted its claws against a ledge at the opening and refused to budge. I think it was Mr. Bartlett himself who told me that, not believing in its poisonous properties, he caught it by the head and pulled it out.

R. A. S.

## ON CONJUGAL INFIDELITY AMONG BIRDS.

BY MR. W. E. HART.

I was interested some weeks ago in reading in the pages of "Nature" several accounts of instances of conjugal infidelity among birds. Curiously enough a somewhat peculiar case came under my own observation shortly afterwards. About the end of April a pair of wild pigeons, in appearance resembling the "blue rock" of England, began to build their nest in my porch on the top of one of the pillars supporting it. One night, before the nest had been completed, the hen bird was attacked in her sleep by some beast (I suppose a rat) which bit off one of her legs. She did not seem much worse for the loss, but from that time nothing seemed to go right with the nest. It was constantly falling to the ground. On two occasions after an egg had been laid in it. At



1886. "Poisonous lizards, the Bis-Cobra." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 1, 145–145.

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