

HERPETOLOGY

New Texas "Varmint"

► THE VARMINTS of Texas now have a new member, the lizard called gecko, known to scientists as *Hemidactylus turcicus turcicus Linnaeus*.

"Definite proof" that the gecko lives in Texas was presented by Dr. Roger Conant of the American Museum of Natural History, New York. Thriving colonies have been discovered in and near Brownsville, he said. In fact, one colony is at home on the stucco building of the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce.

Brownsville is the fourth known locality for the gecko in the United States. It has long been recorded from Key West and Miami, and it has also been reported from New Orleans. Formerly it was known from Africa.

The geckos were not originally native to the United States. They were introduced in connection with human activities, Dr. Conant said.

Dr. Conant also reported a small green snake with a big appetite from Texas. The snake, described as "comparatively rare and

secretive," makes a diet of other small snakes, small toads, young mice, and frogs and lizards of small species.

The little snake, with the large scientific name of *Coniophanes imperialis imperialis Baird*, is particular about just the right moisture conditions.

Dr. Conant keeps one in a pint Mason jar. When he cleans the jar, Dr. Conant leaves it wet and crumples a damp paper towel in the bottom of the jar. Then he adds two other dry paper towels above the damp one.

When first replaced in the jar, the snake coils near the top of the jar. As the paper dries out, he works his way farther down until at the end of the week he is close to the bottom.

Twice each month, the snake eats a young white mouse, seizing it at either head or tail end and slowly engulfing it. Dr. Conant once weighed the snake just before his mouse meal. It weighed 6.6 grams; the mouse the snake swallowed weighed 2.4 grams.

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MEDICINE

Skin Elasticity Can Be Lost at Early Ages

► SKIN CAN lose its elasticity even in relatively young persons.

The condition, known to doctors as senile elastosis, was found in more than three-fourths of a group of patients under 30 years of age. The patients were chiefly World War II soldiers.

The condition apparently is associated with skin cancer. Whether it results from the cancer or is a localized aging mechanism that preceded the cancer has not yet been determined.

These are among findings presented by Lt. Col. Joseph L. Bernier, USA, and Mardelle Clark Reynolds of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology at the dedication of the institute's new building at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Washington.

The skin studies were made on 835 cases of lip cancer. There was no statistical evidence that exposure to the sun's rays, complexion of the patients, X-ray or other radiation treatment, civilian occupation or location of the cancers on upper or lower lip had anything to do with the so-called old age loss of elasticity in the tissues.

Short ultraviolet rays from the sun can produce skin cancers, Dr. Harold F. Blum of the National Cancer Institute and Princeton University, Princeton, N. J., reported.

This does not mean, he said, that the public, or any part of it, should hide from the sun. The cancer-causing part of it can usually be avoided without undue restriction of normal habits, he said.

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ENTOMOLOGY

Fumigation War On

► AN ALL-OUT fumigation war, called the biggest of its kind in the history of the nation, is now underway against the khapra beetle.

One of the newest and most dangerous insect pests to be found in the United States, the khapra beetle is the world's worst pest of stored grain.

The U. S. Department of Agriculture reported that exterminators are trying to eliminate it from the United States by fumigating grain warehouses in California, Arizona and New Mexico. Plans call for sealing over entire warehouses and creating giant gas chambers.

In a pilot test last January, the beetle was successfully eradicated from an infested warehouse in California. Since then, the Department reported, cooperating states and operators have borne the cost of eradication with assistance from the Department. Some warehouses still to be treated contain as much as 6,000,000 cubic feet of space. Sealed with tarpaulins, the grain storage areas are filled with methyl-bromide gas.

The khapra beetle was first discovered in this country in 1953. Now 116 locations in California, 52 in Arizona and four in New Mexico have already been quarantined to prevent the spread of the pest. Control workers have found the beetle under solid masses of grain 21 feet deep.

Experts fear that the beetle is capable of building up, not only in the warmer states, but in heated warehouses throughout the nation.

A native of India, the name "khapra" is

derived from an Indian word meaning "brick." The Department states that the beetles have worked their way through a two-foot brick warehouse wall.

Science News Letter, June 11, 1955

Questions

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GENERAL SCIENCE—How many museums are now operating in the United States? p. 373.

MEDICINE—How many lives were saved during first 15 years use of sulfa drugs and antibiotics? p. 373.

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Photographs: Cover, Clifford E. Matteson; p. 371, General Electric Company; p. 375, Carboloy; p. 378, National Bureau of Standards; p. 384, Eastman Chemical Products, Inc.

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