

THE INDIGENOUS LIZARDS OF JERSEY.

Towards the close of the last Glacial Period it is probable that the large amount of water released from the melting ice of the retreating glaciers forced a passage through the low land which is now the Strait of Dover and opened a river valley through what we know as the English Channel.

Not far from the banks of this river, the course of which is now marked by the depression known as Hurd Deep, were some elevations ; these are now Guernsey and its near by islands ; Jersey was far inland.

When we consider the native lizards of Jersey, the relative ages of the Channel Islands, as islands, must be borne in mind for the forms we now recognize as being indigenous did not live in these parts during the glacial period ; it was during subsequent periods that they reached these parts from the East, South-east and South. Thus we can understand how the later species to arrive did not reach the Guernsey group of islands ; these had already been insulated.

Jersey is the only Channel Island whose Lizards are indigenous, and we have three species. The Green Lizard (*Lacerta viridis*) the Wall Lizard (*Lacerta muralis*) and the so-called "slow-worm" or "blind-worm" (*Angui fragilis*) which is certainly not a worm, nor is it either slow or blind, but very much the reverse. Although this last-named has no external limbs and may look snake-like, yet, as with all members of the Lizard family, it has eyelids and ear openings, while snakes have neither. The ear openings of the slow-worm are, however, difficult to see, as they are small and partly covered by scales.

Neither the Green Lizard nor the Wall Lizard is indigenous in Great Britain. The Wall Lizard is fairly common in many parts of France where the environment is suitable.

A Green Lizard is known in Central France and as far North as the forest of Fontainebleau, but that seems to be the nearest district to us where even an allied variety occurs.

While the Green Lizard may be found in many parts of Jersey, the Wall Lizard is met with only on the North-eastern coast from Bonne Nuit Bay eastwards to Gorey, and does not penetrate inland beyond the cliffs.

It is essentially a cliff, rock, and boulder dweller, but why it does not spread Westwards along the North coast, where the conditions necessary for it seemingly occur, is not obvious.

It is remarkable too that there is no overlapping of the two species : where the area of the one abruptly begins, that of the other abruptly ends.

The changes which take place in the coloration of the Green Lizard as it advances to maturity form an interesting study, and it is these changes which have given rise to the idea that there are numerous varieties.

The young ones which are first in evidence about the end of June, and are then two or three inches in length, are a beautiful pale brown tint, without marking of any kind and the under side is white. As the season advances to about August they have grown to four or five inches in length and the brown tint has become tinged with green, which gradually spreads upwards from the sides, and the under side has changed from white to yellow.

By the month of June in the following year nearly all these young ones, now about eight or nine inches long, have assumed four white lines which run from the neck to nearly the end of the tail. These lines, each about one-sixteenth of an inch wide, are placed one on each side of the back, and one low down the side where the yellow joins the green. There is a marbling of white on the neck, and often on the front limbs also.

Later in the year and in full evidence the following spring, when the lizards are two years old, there is a further change. The young males, while still retaining their white lines, will gradually acquire their speckling of black and gold.

Towards the end of the year the white lines disappear while the white marbling on the throat gradually gives way to blue. Then the following spring, when the lizards are three years old, they will have acquired their final adult colours and markings. Surely few if any creatures of the tropics can surpass this male lizard in beauty.

While the young males have been going through these changes, the young females have also been undergoing variations in their dress. Between the white dorsal lines they show a double row of brown or olive-brown spots, sometimes with black speckling intermixed, but they wear no gold. Later the white lines become cream-coloured. This adult coloration of the females is attained during the second year but like the males the adult stage is reached only when they are three years old.

The length of a full grown *Lacerta viridis* which has suffered no injury (and injury to the tail is frequent) is from twelve to sixteen inches.

Now, a short description of the other Jersey lizard, *Lacerta muralis*. The general ground colour is a delicate silvery grey, upon which are close set spots of olive brown, each with a green bordering.

On the neck and limbs there is often a little marbling and speckling of white. The underside is flesh coloured, the sides pink, and the throat and lower jaw bright red. The female shows the same colours but with the olive-brown most in evidence, and the red on the throat is paler. The length of the adult male is about eight inches, that of the female about six.

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