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## Further Notes on *Lanthanotus*

by

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Since the discovery of a live earless monitor in 1961, several have been kept in captivity, with several different results. Some of the specimens of *Lanthanotus* have thrived, while others died almost immediately. Yet despite the number found (still very few, really), little if anything, has been added to our knowledge of its natural life. Therefore, in review of the facts already presented, and with close scrutiny of several specimens, I propose the following theory as to the natural life of *Lanthanotus borneensis*.

Harrison (1966) reported that hearing and eyesight in *Lanthanotus* were both non-existent. He also states that taste is undetermined, but the important clue here is smell. This sense is described as very keen, and could be the most important clue in discovering the natural diet of the lizard. One other point is that the only food taken besides turtle egg yolk is frozen fish (plaice), in strips. Together, this would seem to indicate that it normally eats worms, or some other sort of worm-like invertebrate. But, too, in "recognising" shape, we can assume that the average *Lanthanotus* may be able to see to some extent, even if only for discerning light from dark, which would allow it to "see" a worm shape. Since the lizard is known to be subterrestrial, the worm diet seems supported.

As for the tail's lack of autonomy, this could be a carry over from prehistoric marine ancestors, which used the appendage for propulsion and could not live without it. In this case, we are assuming that *Lanthanotus* evolved from the sea instead of evolving to the sea. A more simple, but possible answer could be that the earless monitor is, or was, arboreal. The tail does appear to be jointed at short intervals, so it looks prehensile in preserved specimens. Private discussions with others who have examined a live *Lanthanotus* have said that the tail is used in a manner similar to *Chamaeleon*, wrapping it around fingers when the lizard was handled.

If the lizard did have an aquatic ancestry, it may yet depend on water for coolness, or some other factor that even I would contemplate here. Evidence does seem to point out that *Lanthanotus* is best described as subterrestrial.

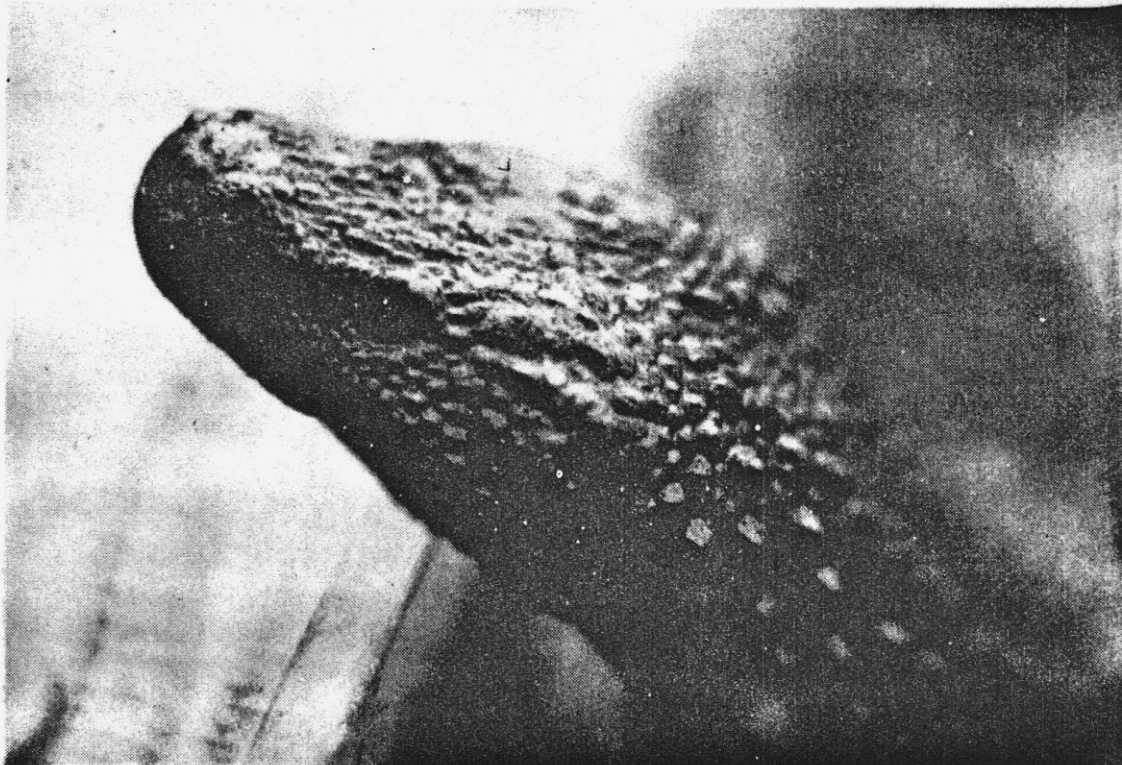
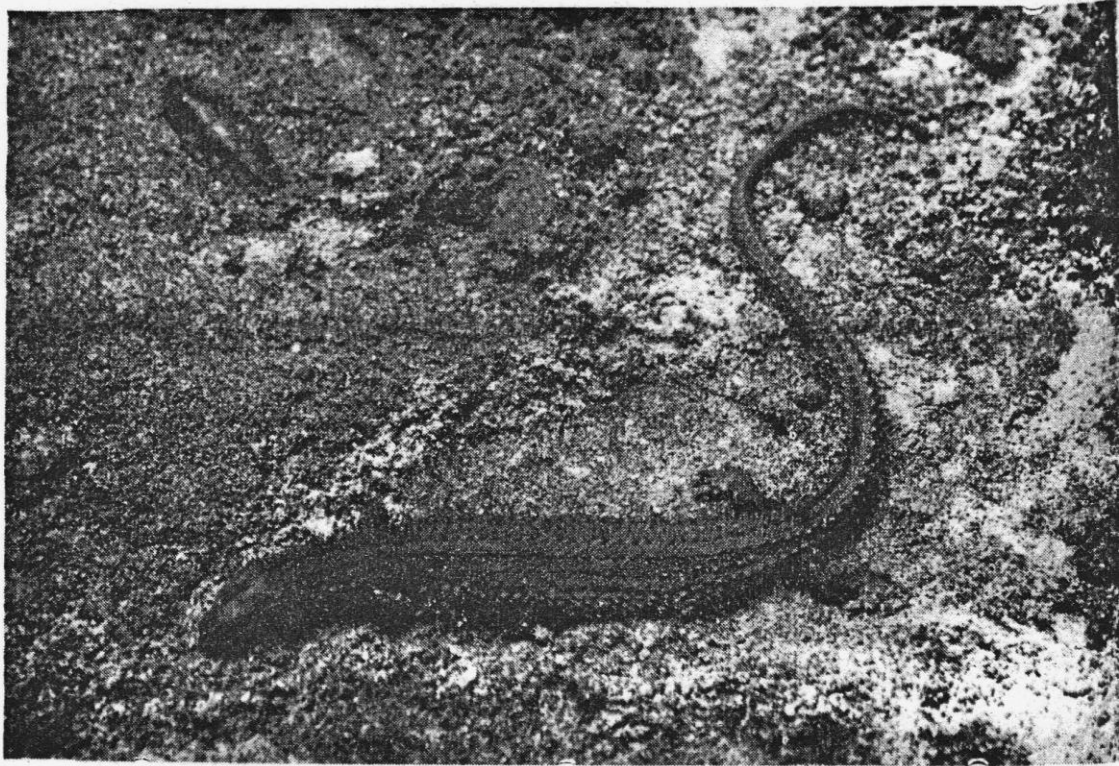


PLATE 30.

*Top:*

Lizard in state of reduced metabolism. Note segment-like tail.

*Bottom*

Note size and location of eyes and nostrils, on top of head, so they may remain above water while the lizard is swimming, in the manner of a crocodile.

One other point seems to need a theory: the metabolic reduction, self induced by the lizard. If at one time the streams, lake and rivers of its home were deeper, the animal would have been able to go further underwater to elude a potential attacker. The reduced temperature may have been too low for even so lethargic a creature as the earless monitor, so it developed a protective device to reduce body functions until the lizard could return to warmth.

As I've already stated that this article is pure speculation, a theory, I do hope that somewhere I've come close enough to an unknown truth so that some researcher can eventually set up experiments to either prove or correct my ideas. If more live specimens were available, maybe we would encounter problems that we can't as yet imagine from a so poorly understood reptile.

#### Literature Cited

- HARRISSON, T. 1961. "The Earless Monitor Lizard", *Discovery* July.
- HARRISSON, T., 1966. "A Record-Size *Lanthanotus* Alive", *Sarawak Museum Journal*, Vol. XIV.
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