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## SOME ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS ON SPHENODON PUNCTATUM IN CAPTIVITY

WARREN N. KECK

In the Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science, Vol. XXX, 1925, pp. 151-155, appeared an article by Wendell Krull on certain habits of *Sphenodon punctatum* which he observed about this animal in captivity. Since September, 1924, the writer has been caring for two of the same specimens upon which Mr. Krull made his observations. The reptiles have been kept under exactly the same conditions as those under which Mr. Krull made his observations so that any changes in habits are not due to changes of conditions. While most of my observations and notes coincide very well with Mr. Krull's, perhaps a few additional notes may be of some interest.

The earliest record that Mr. Krull gives for ecdysis is March 25. This year the same individual went through a period of ecdysis beginning February 22. On the morning of that day, the writer noticed large pieces of scaly skin floating on the surface of the tank of water which is always kept in their box. Upon examination, it was found that most of the skin had been cast during the night, and by the evening of the following day the moult was complete except for the median row of scales on the dorsal surface. This individual is the younger and more active of the two living specimens and, as noted by Krull, was the first one to cast its skin. Perhaps age has something to do with the time of ecdysis, the younger moulting first. This individual is now in a splendid condition and still has the fresh, green coat that it acquired two months ago.

About three weeks later, March 14, the older specimen went through a period of skin-casting. It required four days for this one to complete ecdysis, and then the colors were not as fresh and bright as those of the younger specimen. It will be noted that both these records are somewhat over a month earlier than any previous record. Our seasons are just the reverse of those in the native haunts of the sphenodons in New Zealand. Can it be that these strange reptiles are trying to adjust and acclimatize them-

selves to our seasons? It will be interesting to see if the period of ecdysis becomes earlier each year.

Concerning the food habits of the sphenodons since placed in my care, it may be said that their food has consisted almost entirely of beefsteak. However, since the warm spring days have arrived their menu has been changed, now and then to earthworms. On several occasions raw liver has been placed in their box, and on two such occasions the younger sphenoden has taken the liver into its mouth, but immediately dropped it. As was noted by Mr. Krull, it seems that motion attracts them to their food. Judging from their actions, the writer feels that their sense of smell is poorly developed. The food can be dropped into the box and if they do not observe it fall it will be untouched. It appears that they depend largely upon eyesight for their food. Cubes of steak are often placed between the tips of forceps and waved back and forth to attract their attention. They immediately snap after the food as it passes the head. It has been noted that they prefer shadowed or indirect light to the direct sun rays. Only with difficulty has the writer succeeded in getting them to eat while being in strong light. The food can be placed quite near them but the light apparently is blinding.

Mr. Krull states that seldom did he succeed in getting the sphenodons to take food while in his presence. A marked change has been noted in their tameness since in my care. They will now readily take food out of the writer's fingers, but as soon as a stranger makes his appearance they drop their food and scurry to a dark corner of the box. However, during the past three weeks, they have taken their meal with apparently little concern while students in the laboratory have been watching them.

Little new has been noted that might indicate something of the degree of mentality of these reptiles. The strange expressions of fear, as noted by Krull, are still apparent, but they are exhibited less often than four months ago. Also, the writer feels that they recognize their caretaker. When the lid to their abode is opened, a characteristic, "knowing" turn of the head is always apparent. When a stranger approaches the box they try to hide under the tank of water or seek refuge in a dark corner.

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