

The Green Lizard in Brittany

By L. G. PAYNE

EARLY in the morning we set off from our hotel in Brittany with a good lunch and some items vastly more important, to wit: two nets, large and small, a collapsible handle, various tins, and some thin twine—all packed in one of those capacious knapsacks which to the hunter of small reptiles and amphibians who is not keen on answering too many questions from the merely curious, proves a blessing, and indeed almost a necessity.

So up along the narrow sand-blown lane that winds into the hills—but the sand is not blowing to-day, for the breeze is of the gentlest, and a hot sun favours our quest. Out upon the broad headland, with the rolling Atlantic on three sides, the cultivated lands thin out and fields of broad-leaved maize and white-flowered buck-bean give place to

occasional patches of carrot or clover. Over these the Swallow-tail Butterflies hover, and, as we watch, a glorious Green Lizard glides slowly from under a patch of carrot leaves, and comes into full view, peering at us with quaint birdlike inflections of the head. Lustrous and metallic green are hackneyed words, but they do exactly describe *Lacerta viridis* in the sunlight.

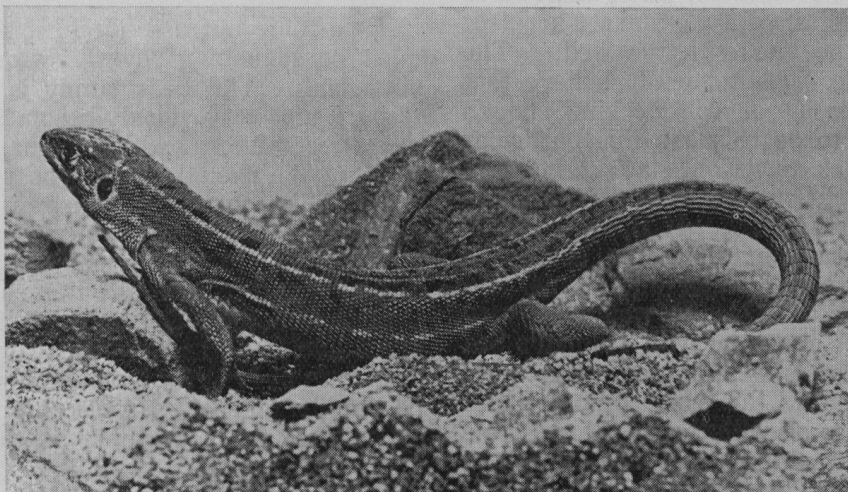
An involuntary movement on our part, and away he goes, in short, sharp runs, seeking green cover wherever it may be found. The French peasants erect low boundary walls, and windbreaks, of inverted grass turves, and it is amongst these that the Green Lizards love to burrow. A grass bank of this description will be honeycombed with lizard runs, much as in England a similar site is holed by field mice. We are now on guard, and presently a sibilant rustling, in the long grass at the foot of a windbreak, precedes the appearance of three fine Lizards, which run across a short, bare patch to the sanctuary of the carrot plants. They have left the safety of their burrows to seek their food in the sunlight, for Lizards do not eat or hunt on dull days.

We lie down unhurriedly on the dry patch, and gaze into the jungle of the carrot stems. Two Lizards have taken alarm and are doubtless in hiding not far away, but the third hesitates, and, seeing us remain quite still, regains his confidence and peers around in a jerky manner. This spasmodic jerkiness appears to be the normal action of the Green Lizard, and is characteristic of body, leg, and head movements. As we watch, a mason bee, beloved of Fabre, alights on the ground, and, unsuspecting, begins to preen its wings. This gives the Lizard its chance, and, with a quick rush, the

bee is seized. There follows a rapid shaking of the victim, its wings are torn off, and the body swallowed. Are the wings deliberately detached, or is this accidental?

More Lizards appear, in apparent ignorance of our proximity. We must now experiment, and see what chance we are likely to have of taking Green Lizards back to England for our collection. Carefully, the large net is produced and the handle fitted. A handsome 12-in.

specimen, with a row of pinhead yellow dots superimposed on the brilliant green, is marked down, the net extended, and crashed on to a carrot plant. The rim, however, fouls a neighbour plant and the Lizard darts away. Again and again this method is tried, but always the Lizard escapes, usually owing to the difficulty of making an effective clamp to earth, but sometimes because the intended



Green Lizard (*Lacerta viridis*)

victim simply is not there when the net arrives!

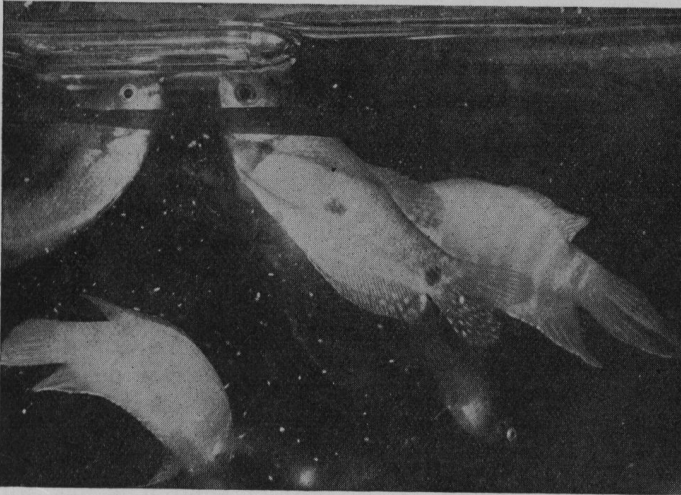
Now this is all very interesting, and even thrilling, but it is also a trifle disappointing, and so I call a halt and suggest lunch. We sit on the short turf listening to the slow roll of the ocean far below, and idly watching white-sailed fishing-boats returning to Cancale.

But again the Lizards claim attention, and—I remember the twine. In Italy, I recall, the peasant boys catch Lizards with a horsehair noose on the end of a stick. I make a slipknot of my twine, and attach this to the net stick, and attempt to lift the noose before a Lizard—but, alas, either because the twine is not horsehair or I am not an Italian peasant, I am completely unsuccessful, and soon this method is discarded.

The sun is high above our heads, it is midday, and we push on along the narrow cliff path. Here the turf is interspersed with prickly gorse—thick, dwarf bushes, which offer certain refuge to the Lizards, which occasionally run in as we approach, while others scamper down the slippery grass declivities seawards where there is no foothold for a human being.

At last we reach the highest point. Below us, a hamlet nestles in the lee of the hill, and there we seek refreshment, where Au Bon Répas invites us to a shaded table. Returning, we skirt the hill, and take a shorter cut through the valley. Here the Tea Plant, *Lycium chinense* grows—a privet-like bush, sometimes used in England as a hedge plant—and here we have a new surprise. We stop to admire the Humming Bird Hawk Moths flitting from flower to flower of the Tea Plant, and, as we look, a Green Lizard runs out along a slender

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The Feeding Ring

Live Foods or Dried Foods?

IT is frequently inferred, by those who favour the use of dried food in preference to live food, that the said live food is necessarily of an animal nature. Arguing from this false premise, it is then stated that many fish, such as Platies, Mollies, and Fancy Goldfish, *i.e.*, species which are largely vegetarian, do better on dried food than if fed exclusively on blood worms, *Daphnia*, *Tubifex*, etc. Therefore, it is concluded, dried food is better than live.

Naturally, a vegetarian species is likely to thrive better on a good dried food of mainly vegetable origin than if it is fed on "meat." It is often not sufficiently appreciated that the digestive organs of a herbivorous animal are very different from those of a carnivore, and that an animal which is strongly adapted to either of these two extremes is totally incapable of dealing adequately with the wrong type of food.

Live food actually includes both fleshy foods, such as earth worms, blood worms, white worms, *Tubifex*.

Daphnia, and, of course, raw meat, liver, fish, etc., and vegetable foods, such as algæ, water plants, lettuce, and spinach. The differences between live foods and good dried foods are mainly questions of bulk and vitamin content. Dried foods which are correctly balanced are necessarily too concentrated, and the small bulk does not properly stimulate the action of the intestines, with the result that the fish tend to suffer from constipation. To get sufficient bulk they must include far too large a proportion of starchy foods, and this will often cause indigestion. Vegetarian fishes are accustomed to a large proportion of "starch" in their natural food, and so can deal fairly well with the bulky dried foods. With regard to the other drawback, fish fed on dried food exclusively are as likely to suffer from vitamin deficiency as were the sailors many years ago, when they had nothing but biscuit and salt meat during their long voyages, and consequently used to suffer terribly from deficiency diseases.

Moreover, it seems to me that it stands to reason that creatures which for countless generations have been accustomed and adapted to feeding on aquatic animal and plant life are likely to thrive better on food of this nature than on an unnatural diet of desiccated foods which, at best, have the disadvantages which we associate with preserved foods for our own meals. Good dried foods are very useful substitutes for fresh food, and are much better than a monotonous diet consisting of only one type of live food, but they still are only substitutes, and while, for most fishes, they are quite satisfactory if used in conjunction with live foods, the fish will never be in tip-top condition if fed on dried food alone.

However, you need not take any of this for granted. Try for yourselves. Feed some of your fishes on a good all-round diet of live foods, both animal and vegetable, with due regard to the proper proportion of the two classes of foods for each species; at the same time feed others on dried foods only, and observe the result. It will probably amaze you.

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branch at eye level, suddenly sees us, and "freezes" to the twig. So exactly does his contour and colour fit into the prevailing greenery, that we almost gasp, and wonder if it is indeed a live thing. Later this sight was to become a commonplace, and, when in this position, it is interesting to note that the Lizard has two definite reactions depending strictly on the action of the potential enemy. If we stop and look at the Lizard, or point at it, or attempt to touch it, away it goes with such amazing speed along the branch and into the seclusion of the thickest part of the bush that the eye can scarcely follow it; but if we, being aware of its presence, walk slowly by, looking at it, "out of the corner of our eye," it will not attempt to move, even though perhaps only a few inches from us. The reptile seems aware of the camouflage of its environment, and is relying on this.

And so we return to the carrot patch. We approach with some stealth and note a few Lizards still active. We count this fortunate, for the sun has nearly set and the air is cool. Now we stand between the Lizards in the carrot jungle and their home in the windbreak.

One or two make a sortie, but retire when our arms are waved. Obviously this is to be our last chance to-day and we wonder if our luck will turn.

Then I realize that fingers and thumbs were made before nets and twine, and so, on hands and knees, I crawl slowly forward to within a foot of where a fine specimen has hidden in a thick mat of carrot leaves. Raising the head, I lean forward, and there, surely, is the tip of the green tail, nearly resembling a blade of grass. Of the body there is no sign, nor can I guess whether this is at an angle from the tail or whether in a line. Nothing for it but to judge as best maybe just where that body is, and so, with rapid movement, eager fingers dive into the foliage. In that same moment comes a squirming, a tighter clasp, and a raising to sight of our first Green Lizard safely caught. His mouth opens and shuts ferociously, but he is quite harmless, and is soon followed into the tin by two others caught in the same fashion.

Enough for to-day—and we'll call it a day—and contentedly return to our hotel.