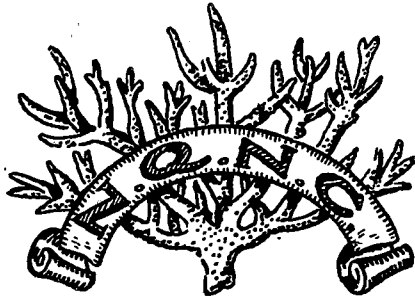


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# THE NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALIST



CAIRNS

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NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALIST CLUB

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# NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALISTS' CLUB

Founded 1932

**OBJECTS** — The Furtherance of the Study of the various branches of Natural History and the Preservation of Our Heritage of Indigenous Fauna and Flora.

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## OBSERVATIONS ON ADULTS AND JUVENILES OF HEMISPHAERIODON GERRARIDI IN CAPTIVITY

BY DANIEL C. WILHOFT

**O**WING to the limited literature on this particular skink, the recording of a few observations made on it in captivity might be of value. Its vernacular name is long-tailed skink, although at one time it was referred to as pink-tongue skink.

Two specimens were collected. The first an adult male (109 gm., 130 mm. snout-vent, 125 mm. tail) was taken on August 20, 1959, from a stone wall in front of a dwelling in East Innisfail. Although this was in a rather built-up residential section of town, there occurs within a short distance an area of rainforest and a freshwater swamp. This specimen was well marked, the dorsal ground color being a slate grey, with very definite and regular black bands extending over the back in the form of saddles. These bands extended from the head to and down the length of the tail. Ventrally the colour was a cream with faint suggestions of pink, especially around the pectoral and pelvic girdles. When first observed the specimen was retreating into a shallow hole in the wall from which it was readily persuaded out with an index finger. This specimen never exhibited any tendency to bite or show any other aggressive behaviour, similar to what is often observed in blue-tongue skinks (*Tiliqua scincoides*).

The second specimen was an adult female (114 gm., 195 mm. snout-vent, 160 mm. tail) taken on November 9, 1959, from a small shed on the edge of a freshwater swamp at Goondi Hill in Innisfail. The female, although of the same ground colour dorsally as the male, did not exhibit the black crossbands except as very faint traces, especially on the lateral surfaces. Ventrally she was much the same as the male. As in the case with the first specimen no aggressive behaviour was observed at any time.

Both adults, when placed on a smooth surface, such as a polished wooden floor, exhibited a characteristic lizard-type of locomotion. But when placed out-of-doors on grass or similar substrate their method changed somewhat. The forelimbs maintained the regular pattern of alternating each leg progressively, but the hindlimbs were held straight back along the body and tail while the entire back section of the body underwent a serpentine sidwinding motion. This combination of locomotory patterns seemed to measurably increase the speed of the skinks' progress through grass, etc.

The adult skinks fed well on mice meat and either milk or water. Milk seemed to be much preferred over water. The two skinks were at no time left together and on December 1, 1959, the male was sacrificed for an alcoholic museum specimen.

On December 19th at 0600 hours the female was discovered in the process of giving birth to young. This took place quite easily apparently, the female merely placing both hind legs against her body in much the same position as when moving through grass and the young issued forth periodically. Usually, that is at least twenty times. The births were single, that is one young at a time, and between births the adult would walk around the cage for short periods. The young were born curled up alive in small transparent sacs, which usually ruptured, allowing the juvenile to crawl out. The first action upon emerging from the sac was to eat it. Once during observations three young were born almost together only seconds occurring between them. These three had an especially difficult time in releasing themselves from the sac-like birth membrane, but after what appeared to be a tremendous struggle freedom was gained. At 2300 hours that evening thirty-three young were present and this constituted the entire brood.

The young greatly resembled the captive male in coloring, with even more intense black bands, and apparently less ground color. It is

interesting to note that the vernacular name, pink tongue, was later changed to long-tailed because of the amount of variation in tongue colour and not one of these young had a pink tongue, although the adult female very definitely did. The young were immediately active after birth and used their tongues almost continuously to gain olfactory impressions of their environment. The female, who showed no interest whatever in her progeny was removed on the next day should her interest develop into something predatory. The young, whose average weight was 2.5 gm. and snout-vent measured 55 mm. (overall length 95 mm.) ate freely of mice meat on the second day and continued to do so. It was amazing to observe the size of meat particles these young skinks were able to take. Often pieces twice the size of their heads were attacked and worked on until they were forced down. Both water and milk were taken freely.

Thanks are due to Mr. G. Mack of the Queensland Museum for providing positive identification of this skink.

## HONEYEATERS OF THE ATHERTON DISTRICT

**T**HE family Meliphagidae, comprising sixty eight (68) species, is well represented in the Atherton areas, which have approximately thirty (30) species, rain forest, open forest, heath lands, providing abundant nectar, insects, small fruits and berries.

Ranging in size from four (4) inches in the small, beautiful Scarlet Honeyeater, *Myzomela sauginoleta*, to over thirteen (13) inches in that remarkable, noisy, pugnacious species, Noisy Friarbird, *Philemon corniculatus*, sometimes called Leatherhead.

Carefree and happy are the Honeyeaters as they wander through the bushlands feeding on the nectar of Eucalyptus, Turpentine, Paperbarks, Bottlebrushes and many flowering shrubs. Possessing curved and long, slender bills, brush tongues, they move quickly from flower to flower, performing many acrobatic feats, at times feeding upside down.

Some species, including Scarlet Honeyeaters, Friarbirds and Banded Honeyeaters, are nomadic and travel great distances following the nectar flow. Other species such as the White Cheeked are more or less confined to a particular habitat. White Cheeked preferring a low-lying, swampy habitat. Lewin H. can be found in many areas and if not seen can be heard, his ringing call being a feature of the bush. Macleay species, a rare one, is confined to Rain Forest areas and rarely seen. The small Brown Honeyeater has a seasonal movement to coastal areas in the autumn months, returning to breed; the small, cup-shaped nest usually overhangs water and contains two eggs.

Most Honeyeaters have a limited song range. Friarbirds in particular have harsh chattering voices, other species weak, piping calls. The Brown Honeyeater has a song range equal to any other species, and the Scarlet species a tinkling, pretty song and can be heard even when other species are silent.

The *Melithreptus* group, known as Blackcap, are a very interesting group of medium size and more or less similar in color, upper parts being olive yellow with black crown, a white band across the nape. Each of the local species, three (3), can be recognised by the color of the naked skin around the eyes. Mainly confined to high treetops they will at times be seen in dwarf ti-trees.

Some species, such as the Yellow Honeyeater, Banded Honeyeater and the Blue-faced, visit town gardens and the Lewin is a regular visitor when Hibiscus shrubs are in bloom.

Generally the breeding season is more or less governed by the flow of nectar and has a range from June to April locally.

—J. A. BRAVERY

## AN ORNITHOLOGICAL PROBLEM

A GROUP of modern systematists have defined a set of fairly flexible rules which somewhat change the old species definition. For the purpose of this article, at this point, it is enough to say that many species defined, primarily on morphological grounds, are now considered but geographical races or subspecies of some other closely related species and two or more such old species are then often combined to form a so-called superspecies.

For example, in reviewing birds in particular, forms differing in colour and geographical range but agreeing otherwise structurally, physiologically and ecologically were given full specific status. Under the new systematic conception, colour and range are of minor importance if the other three criteria are in accord. The fact that there is no overlap in range and thus no direct evidence that the two forms differ biologically, usually, genetic distinctions are sufficient for the trained systematist to make his classification and if evidence is in agreement the forms will be considered discontinuous varieties or geographic subspecies. If any of the above criteria is at variance these forms must be considered borderline cases which through such discontinuous distribution are on the way to becoming, or have already become distinct and are then generally known as allopatric species. In the event that the geographic range of two such forms overlap and they remain biologically isolated, such forms attain full specific rank and are known as sympatric species.

One such complex exists in the *Meliphagidae*, that family of primarily nectar-eating birds, whose centre of dominance is in the Australian region. Three species, under the old concept, are involved and belong to the genus *Meliphaga* and are the Singing Honeyeater (*M. virescens*), Mangrove Honeyeater (*M. fasciogularis*), and Varied Honeyeater (*M. versicolor*).

*M. virescens* inhabits most of the drier interior of Australia extending to the coast in the low-rainfall areas, particularly in Western Australia. Both *fasciogularis* and *versicolor* are primarily birds of the mangroves, never venturing more than a mile or so from tidal waters, at least, within Queensland. The Mangrove Honeyeater ranges from about Stuart's Point, some miles south of the mouth of the Macleay River, in New South Wales, to Townsville in Queensland. The Varied Honeyeater extends from somewhere in the vicinity of Cardwell in Queensland to New Guinea in the north. The Singing Honeyeater is said to inhabit scrublands of Mulga, Mallee, etc., in the interior and no doubt also mangroves where it reaches the islands and coastal areas in the west.

It will be noted that, ecologically, these forms do not differ greatly. All are nectar sippers who vary their diet by eating insects and other forms of lower life. All appear to prefer a moderate to low, bushy growth in which to nest and generally inhabit. Climatically, a greater variation is apparent but then, many easily identified species within the same family range through extremes of rainfall and temperature. In fact the colour changes within the complex could be attributed to Gloger Effect; namely the relationship between rainfall and humidity, colour variants of a species becoming brighter in colouration as rainfall and humidity rise.

Morphologically, and without considering organic structure, all are of about the same size and much the same shape; colour differs, and is more fully described broadly and as would be observed in the field in a tabulated form below. It does not appear to vary to any noticeable degree throughout the whole range of each form, though no data are available on *versicolor* in New Guinea. Birds of this form observed at Horn Island in Torres Strait appeared to be lighter overall which would be consistent with Gloger Effect, and in a genetic sense accords with close relationship.

Physiologically, all nests are of the more usual Honeyeater type, being suspended cups, and are placed among the foliage of bushy trees: *virescens* is said to have two to three eggs to the clutch while two is the usual clutch of both *fasciogularis* and *versicolor*. It is said that there is

little difference in the breeding season, nidification taking place between July and December though it is probable that the Singing Honeyeater's breeding is effected more by rainfall than by the yearly cycle. The courtship pattern of the mangrove dwellers is identical and in the main consists of much darting through bushy foliage with interceptions, and short rest periods within such foliage, with much noisy calling while the birds are in motion. Calls, apparently, are very alike though the Singing Honeyeater is reputed to have the least musical notes, while the Varied Honeyeater's are louder and somewhat sweeter than those of the Mangrove Honeyeater which itself is no mean songster if the repetition of a few notes is not considered too monotonous. There is no noticeable difference in the flight rhythm of *fasciocularis* and *versicolor*; it is fast and undulating with a rapid wing-beat followed by a slight pause.

The geographical range of any of the three forms, as far as is known from information available, does not overlap and this forms the crux of the problem. Thus there is no information of one form intergrading into either of the others nor is it known if they are biologically isolated. No records to hand report the Singing Honeyeater from eastern coastal Australia and it is known that neither of the mangrove dwellers venture far from tidal areas. Again, no information can be obtained on the Mangrove Honeyeater north of Townsville or on the Varied Honeyeater from south of the Cardwell district which leaves a coastal gap, still containing the same form of mangrove habitat, of some 75 miles.

A much clearer picture of the relationship of the latter two forms could be obtained if ornithologists would make a survey of this rather restricted area and obtain information, mainly through colour variation, that would answer the following questions:—

1. Do the two forms intergrade? In such case they would be but two geographic races (subspecies) of a single species, showing a colour cline through a limited part of their range.
2. Do they overlap in range, but do not interbreed? This would prove that they are biologically isolated and good (sympatric) species; colour distinctions should remain constant.
3. Is there a region in which neither exists? In this case they would be geographically isolated forms and could be considered either allopatric species, or geographic races of the same species and would be in agreement with the borderline condition discussed earlier in this article.

### Major Colour Variations in *Meliphaga* Complex under Review

| Colour         | <i>M. veriscesnes</i>                  | <i>M. fasciocularis</i>   | <i>M. versicolor</i>                                   |
|----------------|--|---|--|
| Above          | Greyish-brown.                         | Greyish-olive green.  | Olive green tinged with yellow.                        |
| Below          | Streaked buff and grey.                | Light brown streaked with dark brown, particularly throat and breast. | Yellow streaked with olive green; almost white throat. |
| Ear-patch      | Yellow tipped with white. (Prominent.) | Yellow tipped with white. (Prominent.)                                | Yellow tipped with white. (White only prominent.)      |
| Wing Primaries | Greyish-brown tinged with yellow.      | Olive green tinged with yellow.                                       | Much as the rest of upper parts.                       |
| Rectrices      | Greyish-brown tinged with yellow.      | Brown, very lightly tinged with yellow.                               | Much as the rest of upper parts.                       |

The bill, in each instance is short and decurved, but no records are available of the colour of either the bills or legs except of the Singing Honeyeater which has a black bill and light grey-blue legs.

In the event of any ornithologist following up this problem I would be pleased to supply such further data as I have and would be interested to know the results, irrespective of their being positive or negative in character.

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—L. AMIET

## A NEW SPECIES OF TAENIOPHYLLUM (ORCHIDACEA)

FROM THE TABLELANDS OF NORTH QUEENSLAND

BY A. W. DOCKRILL, EDGE HILL, CAIRNS, QLD.

### TAENIOPHYLLUM FLAVUM Spec. Nov.

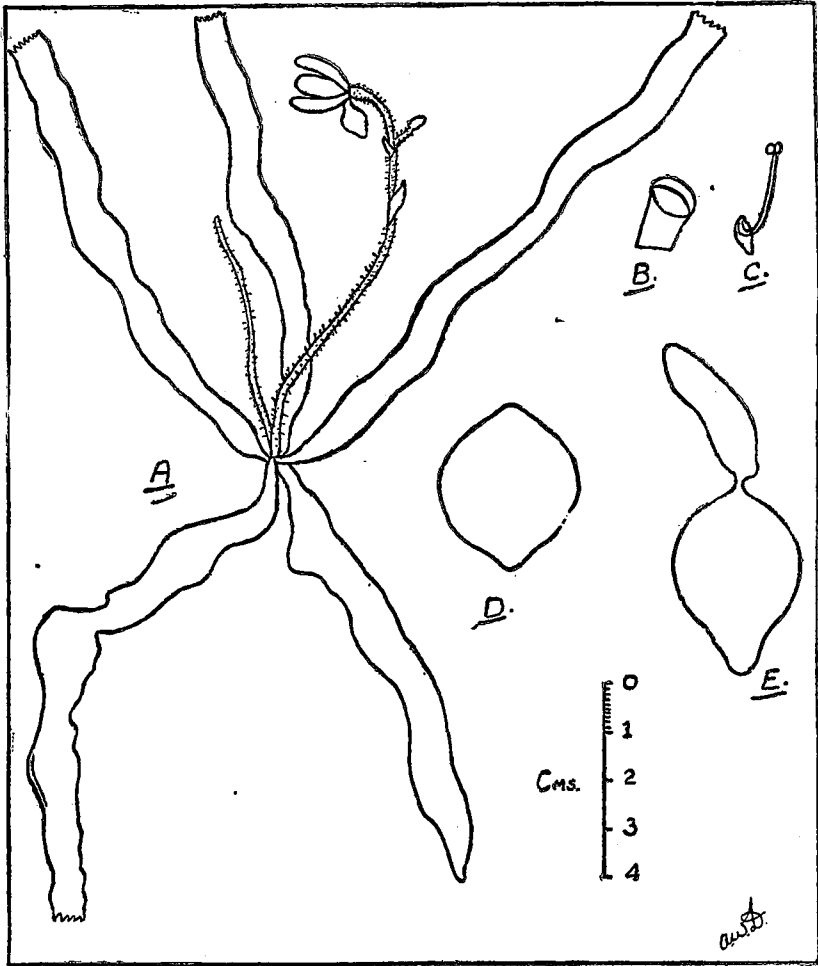
Planta efoliata. Radices c. 1.5 mm latae. Pedunculus c. 18 mm longus, papillosus; papillae albae, subglandulae; bractus in pedunculo altus, ovatus-actus. Pedicelli 2, c. 2 mm longi, papillosi sicut in pedunculo; bracti multo minores bracto pedunculi. Flores flavi, segmenta non coniuncta. Sepala similia, c. 2.5 x 1.0 mm (in plano), anguste cymbiformia. Petala c. 2.0 x 1.5 mm (in plano), obtuse cymbiformia. Labelium (sine calcar) c. 1.5 x 1.5 mm, columnan amplectens; cybiforme, marginibus lateralibus involutis; sed in plano suborbiculare. Calcar c. 2.0 x 1.25 mm, ovoidum, erga extremum angustius. Columna c. 0.5 mm longa, viridis. Anthera alba; caudiculus pellucidus, loratus; discus viscidus ovatus-actus.

HOLOTYPE: North Queensland, Ravenshoe District 6/9/1958 (Leg.: K. Wadsworth, J. H. Wilkie, S. F. St. Cloud, T. Bentley and A. W. Dockrill). Bot. Mus. and Herb., Brisbane.

Plant leafless, roots up to 1.5 mm. across, flat. Peduncle up to 18 mm. long, filiform, papillose, papillae white, subglandular; bract high on the peduncle, about 1 x 1 mm, ovate-acute. Pedicels 2, up to 2 mm. long, including ovary, papillose similarly to peduncle; bracts much smaller than that of peduncle. Flowers bright yellow, expanding, but not widely so, segments free. Sepals similar, about 2.5 x 1.0 mm. when flattened, narrow-cymbiform. Petals not quite as long as sepals but broader (about 1.5 mm. when flattened), obtuse-cymbiform. Labelium, excluding spur, about 1.5 x 1.5 mm., column-embracing, sub-cymbiform by lateral margins being involute, but sub-orbicular when flattened; spur about 2.0 x 1.25 mm., ovoid and contracted at narrow end. Column about 0.5 mm. long, green. Anther white; caudicle lorate, translucent; viscid disc ovate-acute.

The Free segments of the flowers of this species distinguished it from the other four Australian species, *T. muelleri* Lindl., *T. cymbiforme* Hunt, *T. wilkianum* Hunt and *T. lobatum* Dock. Perhaps it has most affinities with *T. wilkianum* Hunt, but no leaves are present, the peduncles are hispid

instead of smooth and the spur of the labellum is set at a different angle and it is larger and is much contracted at the base instead of being broad and the sepals and more particularly the petals are not acute. It is readily distinguished from the only other Australian species with hispid peduncles, *T. lobatum* Dock, by the larger size of the flowers which open more widely, entire instead of lobed lamina of the labellum and much larger spur which is almost globular and much contracted at the base rather than cylindrical.



**TAENIOPHYLLUM FLAVUM** Dock. Spec. Nov.

- a. Whole plant x 5.
- b. Column x 20.
- c. Viscid disc, caudicle and pollinia (greatly magnified).
- d. Lamina of labellum, flattened x 20.
- e. Labellum from the side x 20.



### THREE POISONOUS BROWN SNAKES

**Q**UITE a lot of confusion is evident from time to time in relation to the correct identification of the three Brown Snakes—namely the Taipan (*Oxyuranus scutellatus*) the Common Brown Snake (*Demansia textiles*) and the King Brown or Mulga Snake (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*).

The Taipan is to be found along the whole of the Queensland coastal areas right through to the tip of Cape York Peninsula and inland for approximately 40 miles—to my knowledge it has not been found west of the Great Dividing Range.

The Taipan is a large snake with a recorded length of 11 feet. Unlike the Brown Mulga Snake, its head is long and narrow with a distinct canthus and is quite distinct from the neck. It has long jaws which enables it to open its mouth to a 90-degree angle. The colour of the head is always several shades lighter than the rest of the body; the eye is large, round and orange coloured around a black pupil; the body scales vary from a light tan to almost black but irrespective of the body colour the head is always several shades lighter in colour. The ventral or belly scales are creamy white with a mother of pearl iridescent effect and are blotched with reddish to brown blotches or freckles. The jaws are equipped with large fangs and a plentiful supply of very powerful neurotoxin and haemorrhagic venom. It is rightly classed as one of the largest deadliest snakes in the world. A bite from one must be treated immediately and the patient taken to medical aid without any delay so as to have treatment by the specific Taipan Anti-venene, as without this treatment the chances of survival are very remote, as proved by the high death rate prior to the anti-venene being available. The dorsal scales are keeled and number 23 around the body. The scalation is shown in the chart below.

The King Brown or Brown Mulga Snake is also to be found in the same areas as the Taipan, though not very prevalent in the coastal regions. This is also a large snake with a recorded length of 12 feet and a corresponding large girth. The head is large and broad and not distinct, from the neck and is the same colour as the rest of the body which is a coppery to a light brown. The scales are coarse and large and are not keeled. The belly scales are yellowish white without any blotches or freckles. The fangs are short for a large snake and the venom supply is also small in comparison and not near as deadly as the Taipan or Common Brown, although immediate treatment should be given and the patient taken to a doctor without delay.

The Common Brown Snake (*Demansia textiles*) is found practically all over Australia though not very common on the coast. It has a wide colour range of the different shades of brown. The belly scales are creamy white with red or brown freckles like the taipan. The length has been recorded at seven feet. Unlike the taipan the head is short and the jaws not as long; the fangs are not long and the venom supply not very large although very deadly. Immediate first aid treatment is necessary and medical aid should be sought without delay. Scalation as shown in the chart below.

| Species             | Ventrals | Sub-Caudels | Anal Scale | Body Scales | Blotches on Belly | Infra Labials | Supra Labials |
|---------------------|----------|-------------|------------|-------------|-------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Taipan              | 234/255  | 60/70       | Paired     | Single      | 23                | Yes           | 6             |
| Common Brown        | 190/220  | 45/75       | Paired     | Paired      | 17                | Yes           | 6             |
| Mulga or King Brown | 180/220  | 50/70       | Paired     | 17          | No                | 6             | 6             |
|                     |          | Half Paired |            |             |                   |               |               |
|                     |          | Half Single |            |             |                   |               |               |

To Summarise: The Taipan has a single anal scale and all paired sub-caudal scales, with blotches or freckles on the belly.

The Common Brown Snake has paired anal scales and all paired sub-caudal scales, with belly blotches like the Taipan.

The Brown Mulga Snake has paired anal scales and half the sub-caudals are paired and half are single. No blotches on the belly.

#### TREATMENT

(1) Immediately apply a ligature to a single bone part of the limb; that is above the elbow or above the knee if bitten on a limb.

(2) Wash bitten area to wash away any venom remaining on the skin—in an emergency use water, spittle or even urine.

(3) Incise wound through fang punctures in a longitudinal direction to permit bleeding—remember a patient can lose a pint of blood without any ill effects. Apply suction if possible as the blood washes out the venom.

(4) Get patient to a doctor immediately and tell the doctor the type of snake involved, if possible, and also how long ligature has been applied.

(5) If there is any delay in getting medical aid the ligature must be released after 20 minutes for 30 seconds and then every 10 minutes after.

—VINCENT M. REILLY

## CLUB ACTIVITIES.

THE Bruce Weir on the Walsh River, 69 miles from Cairns, a short turn-off from the road to Dimbulah, a couple of miles short of that town, was the venue of the club's January field day.

The river, just overflowing the dam wall, presented an expanse of water lilies, some in flower, over the leaves of which several Lotus birds (*Irediparraga linacea*) were seen moving, accompanied by their chicks.

Other birds noted in the open forest surroundings were the Little Grebe (*Podiceps ruficalis*), Coot (*Fulica atra*), Noisy Friar Bird (*Philemon corniculatus*), Koel (*Eudynamis orientalis*), Olive Backed Oriole (*Oriolus sagittatus*) and the Black Backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*).

A junior member found a juvenile specimen of Children's Python, six inches long, under a stone, and a couple of specimens of quartz crystal were obtained from a quartz intrusion in sedimentary rock on the river bank.

Several spider specimens were collected and identified by Mrs. M. E. Hall, the Club's Arachnidologist, for whom this field day will be the last for a while, on account of Mr. Hall's transfer to Brisbane, members bidding her a regretful farewell before the party left to return to Cairns.

On the evening of Friday, February 26 a very successful social evening was held in the club room, during which Mr. C. Luppi screened two very good nature films, one showing a lion hunt by Masai natives armed only with spears and shield, two lions being the score, the other showing fauna in the Yellowstone Park, and the geysers of its thermal region.

Mr. N. C. Coleman provided a most interesting and instructive series of slides shown under his two microscopes, one of which, fitted with a polariser, showed clearly the structure of several minerals and semi-precious gem stones.

The evening's entertainment concluded with the screening by Miss B. P. Mole of a series of land and seascape transparencies in colour, of her own photography, including pictures taken during the abovementioned January field day, a really good selection of views.

In the attendance members were outnumbered by junior members, to whom microscopes are a never failing attraction.

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| Marine Biology ..... | Mr. A. A. READ                       |
| Minerology .....     | Mr. G. ATKINSON                      |
| Ornithology .....    | Mrs. J. CASSELS, Mr. J. MACDOUGALL   |
| Orchidology .....    | Mr. A. W. DOCKRILL, Mr. S. ST. CLOUD |
| Lepidoptery .....    | Mr. S. DEAN                          |

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**CLUB HANDBOOKS**

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# W. C. Balzer

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