

Asiatic Giant Salamander Caught in the Sacramento River, and an Exotic Skink near San Francisco.
George S. Myers. June 1951.
Copeia 1951(2): 179-180.

ASIATIC GIANT SALAMANDER CAUGHT IN THE SACRAMENTO RIVER, AND AN EXOTIC SKINK NEAR SAN FRANCISCO.—As means of transportation and numbers of people grow, it is inevitable that strange animals and plants will be introduced, and collected, with increasing frequency. Records of these are sufficiently interesting to publish, even though, as in the present instances, the information is not too exact.

In 1939 or 1940, I received a message to the effect that a Sacramento River commercial fisherman had caught a "strange" animal which he had alive in his apartment. The animal was a fine *Megalobatrachus* (unquestionably identified generically by its closed gill openings), in perfect condition, alive in a wooden trough suspended in the bathtub, where I handled and examined it carefully for about 30 minutes. It was between 25 and 30 inches in length. Its captor said he found it in one of his catfish traps, set in the Sacramento River, "below Sacramento but above the delta." Probably this was not far from Walnut Grove.

Unfortunately, I was unable to make a specific identification, for the Chinese *M. davidianus* was not adequately differentiated from the Japanese *M. japonicus* in the literature then available to me. Moreover, the creature exhibited coloration quite at variance not only with that of the several live Japanese examples I have seen, but also with published accounts of the color of Chinese specimens. The dorsum was a uniform dark brown, with an irregular sparse sprinkling over all the back of rather well defined dull yellow spots, these spots being of irregular outline and about one centimeter in diameter. There were no small spots, darker than the ground-color, which is the common color-pattern of all the examples of *Megalobatrachus* I have seen, and the ground-color was definitely brownish, not slaty gray. Also, it must be emphasized that there was nothing to indicate that the coloration was due to disease. The animal appeared to be in the very best of condition.

The source of the specimen is, of course, unknown. Its strange coloration even suggested the possibility of a native Californian *Megalobatrachus*, which would not be zoogeographically surprising, but no other captures have been reported. Giant salamanders are said to be kept alive in temples in China and there are many Chinese in

California. Escape of such an example is a possible explanation. Several years before the incident (in 1936 or 1937) a San Francisco firm which dealt in live frogs for biological laboratories advertised receipt of a consignment of live giant salamanders but I did not see their stock. Finally, it is possible that the specimen was never in the Sacramento River and that the fisherman's story was made up out of whole cloth. Certainly the muddy lower Sacramento is unlike the clear running water frequented by *Megalobatrachus*, but I see no reason why one of these animals could not survive in the Sacramento. Besides, circumstantial evidence pointed strongly to the truth of the fisherman's story.

Quite as strange was another such capture made while I was a student at Stanford, in 1930. The late Prof. James I. MacMurphy of the Botany Department, brought me a quite unexpected skink of large size (nearly 1 foot) and probable Australian affinity, caught the day before with his neighbor's help on a hill in the western outskirts of the town of San Mateo. The beast had a blue tongue, but was considerably rougher in squamation and duller in color than the common *Tiliqua scincoides*, with which I was familiar. However, it did not have the very rough scales and short tail of *Trachysaurus rugosus*. With my rudimentary knowledge of Australian herpetology, and Boulenger's "Catalogue of Lizards," the beast was identified as being close to the genus *Tiliqua*. As I was shortly to leave on a trip, I took the skink to the Steinhart Aquarium to be kept alive, and asked that it be given to Mr. J. R. Slevin, herpetologist of the California Academy, if it died. Upon my return, the animal had died and somebody had thrown it out, together with all hope of carefully identifying it. Prof. MacMurphy's neighbor told him that he had previously killed a lizard of the same size and kind as the one they later caught alive. Where the animals came from is unanswered. No others have been reported.—GEORGE S. MYERS, *Natural History Museum, Stanford University, Stanford, California.*