

THE *TZUCHINOKO*: A NEW HYPOTHESIS

(Response to Bauer and Russell)

We found the comments by Bauer and Russell on the *tzuchinoko* very interesting, especially coming from professional herpetologists, which, to be quite honest, we are not. Nevertheless, we would like to draw attention to several points. First, besides the fact that we are not herpetologists, we could hardly refer to a book published in 1987 in a paper first submitted for publication at the end of 1986. Second, we do not have a particular preference for either of the two proposed hypotheses.

The testimony of the little girl is cited, among others, without any analysis in that particular section of the article. It is, indeed, regrettable that we did not treat the matter further in our later evaluation. We do know that *Agkistrodon halys* is a very polymorphic species, and we by no means rejected the hypothesis of a rare ecomorph (see p. 47).

We do not rule out the jumping capacity of the *tzuchinoko*, but we still consider reports of 2–3-m leaps on flat ground to be probable exaggerations. In this connection, it is obvious that we have not been successful in explaining the lack of vertebrae in the tail. What we were really trying to emphasize, however, was the hypothesis that, in the tail of the *tzuchinoko*, the vertebrae are fused in a style or “terminal body,” as is the case in crotalid snakes.

Observations of a snake evoking the *tzuchinoko* in New Guinea need further investigation. In the meantime, there is another hypothesis that we completely neglected, and that was not considered by Bauer and Russell either: that reports of the *tzuchinoko* (or at least some of the reports) may stem from the accidental introduction of a foreign species into Japan in shipments of lumber from Southeast Asia. We are seeking further information on this possibility.

We entirely agree with Bauer and Russell when they point out the importance of searching for small and discrete unknown animals. If they are not ethnoknown, however, they are, of course, outside the scope of cryptozoology. In any case, the adjective “microcryptozoological” seems superfluous to us.

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