

Figure 1.
 Billy Price (extreme left)
 leading a field party of
 Stanford students in 1895.
 Note the LUVs (long-
 eared utility vehicles)
 used by the party to haul
 their equipment and supplies.
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V. Crotalus pricei, Van Denburgh, 1895 – Twin-spotted rattlesnake

Edward O. Moll

Adjunct Professor
 School of Renewable Natural Resources
 University of Arizona

In the previous column, the Ridge-nosed rattlesnake was highlighted and, so in this issue, it seems appropriate to address a kindred species, the Twin-spotted rattlesnake. These two snakes are similar in several respects. Both are diminutive, high altitude, Madrean Crotalids whose ranges barely penetrate Southwestern U.S. Even their type specimens were collected in the same place, Ramsey Canyon, Cochise Co. Arizona. However, to paraphrase a guy named Gause, no two rattlesnakes can do exactly the same thing in the same place at the same time. They have to be different to coexist, and in this case, the differences involve habitat and food. While the Twin-spotted prefers hard rock and spiny lizard entrees, the Ridge-nose is more into soft soil and rodent repasts.

On May 19, 2001, Walter Schoeple, a retired surgeon and fellow THS member, and I set off on a field trip to the Chiricahuas. The Twin-spotted rattlesnake ranked high on our want list for the trip. I had been scouring the rock piles of the Huachucas in vain for the little beast, but according to an old snaker I had talked to, the Cherry Cows was where I should be looking. Thanks to Carl Kauffeld, I spoke enough localese to know that he was referring to the Chiricahuas. Kauffeld in *Snakes and Snake Hunting* had written that natives to Southeastern Arizona called

this sky island the Cherry Cows, and I had stored this information away for future reference.

Arriving at mid afternoon, our first objective was to seek out the talus slope habitat of *Crotalus pricei*. At 7700 feet we encountered a particularly nice looking rocky slope and left our jeep to investigate. Walking through the grass and pines toward the site, the inaugural reptile of the trip, a Slevin's bunch grass lizard (*Sceloporus slevini*), scampered across a well-worn path, and likely beaten into the soil by legions of herpers before us. Upon reaching the rocks, the temperature was 60° and the sun was shining but, shortly thereafter, thunder rolled and soon a cold rain began to fall. I am sure that I had been told that it does not rain in southern Arizona in May. Somebody lied! The rain did not last long, but the temperature plummeted to 48°. Deciding that any future searching would have to wait until the following day, we drove back down to Highway 80 and proceeded up to Rodeo, New Mexico. It was still light and the only herp sightings on this first run were a live *Phrynosoma cornutum* and a well-flattened *Pituophis catenifer*. Our game plan was simply to drive back and forth on 80, through the late afternoon and on into the night. Unfortunately our plan produced no additional reptiles, but the road running did cede several *Bufo cognatus* and *Scaphiopus couchi* after dark. By 9:30 PM it was time for the intrepid, but aged, herpers to retreat back up into

the mountains and make camp. Armed with the knowledge that it did not rain in Arizona in May, I brought only a fold up cot from which I was contemplating doing some serious stargazing until I dropped off to sleep. Walter, who must not have heard about rainless Mays, brought a nice little popup tent. Within 15 minutes after retiring, clouds and rain replaced the stars and I quickly folded my cot and raced to the car where I shivered for the next hour. Finally it appeared safe to set up the cot again. But I spent the rest of the night, alternately pulling up a plastic tarp with each onset of drizzle and throwing it off again, as the heat and humidity became excessive.

Following breakfast the early morning was spent birding, while waiting for the talus slopes to heat up to the point that would stimulate reptilian activity. For the most part, we saw only typical avian fare; Steller's and Mexican Jays, Yellow-eyed juncos, and Hairy woodpeckers. However, along the Portal Road, I saw my first Scaled quail. Finally at 9:30 AM, it was time to return to the talus slopes. An hour and a half search at the first site revealed only Mountain spiny lizards (*Sceloporus jarrovi*) skittering over the rocks. We moved on to another slope at 8000'. At this extensive talus slope, Walter headed up slope and I headed down. After walking about 75 feet, I stopped to observe a Mountain spiny lizard that appeared to be eating something. Looking around behind me to find a flat, sitting rock from which to observe, I saw, within 6 feet of me, a small Twin-spotted rattlesnake warming itself in full sunlight next to a rock crevice. Transfixed by the little serpent and hardly daring to breathe, let alone move, I just stared at him for several minutes. Finally slowly reaching back, I extracted the camera from my pack. Although it bore a zoom lens rather than the macro, I could not afford the time to change. There was no telling when the snake might retreat into the crevice. I called to Walter and then got as close as I dared and began to shoot. Five shots later, Walter arrived with his camera. But before he even saw it, the snake, perhaps sensing his arrival, withdrew into the rocks. Over the next hour, Walter saw another Twin-spotted on the move through the rocks but there were no more photo ops. We departed the talus slopes at noon and headed back to Tucson. Although relatively few herps had rewarded our efforts, the great looks at a Twin-spotted rattlesnake, our target species, in its natural environs made this trip to the Cherry Cows a bonzer* venture. (*Australian for remarkable)

John Van Denburgh, the describer of *Crotalus pricei*, was curator of the California Academy of Sciences collection from 1895 until his death in 1924. He was an ardent collection builder and his love for his collection once caused him to risk his life for it. During the 1906 earthquake and fire, he rushed into the crumbling Academy of Science building to rescue specimens. Although over 8000 specimens were lost, Van Denburgh managed to save most of the holotypes

(13) including the type series of *Crotalus pricei* (CAS-SU 1702) which he had described in 1895. In his description he presented the following dedication: "In a collection of reptiles, made by Mr. W. W. Price for the Leland Stanford Junior University, is a new species of rattlesnake which I take pleasure in naming for its energetic collector."

William Wightman Price, or Billy as he was known to his field companions, was a dedicated field biologist and nature lover who participated in the pioneer decade of field exploration that followed the opening of Stanford University in 1891. Natural history was the name of the game and expeditions, sponsored by private and government patronage, fanned out over the globe to collect and stock the shelves of Stanford's fledgling museum. A few of the better known collector/adventurers associated with this period were David Starr Jordan, C. H. Gilbert, John Van Denburgh, W. F. Allen, and Edmund Heller. Price, a Stanford student at the time, established his reputation as a collector of birds, mammals, and reptiles in expeditions to the Sierra Nevada Mountains and southern Arizona.

Price, born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, January 20, 1871, was forced to become independent at an early age. His mother died when he was two and following a move to Riverside, California his father died, leaving Billy an orphan at 14. He temporarily quit school to become a vagabond. For a year and a half, he traveled the wilds of Arizona exploring mountains and deserts while collecting mammals and birds. On his return to California, Price entered Oakland High School, paying some of his expenses with the sale of animal skins he had collected. Mountains and deserts remained Price's chief preoccupation, however. Whenever the chance presented itself, he was off to some wild place, whether it was during a legitimate break in the school calendar or one of many unexcused absences. On one such absence in 1888, at 17 years of age, he made a trip to the pine forests of the Huachuclas and recorded the first specimen of the Rose-throated Becard in the U.S. Thanks to an understanding teacher who encouraged and guided him, Billy did make it through high school and entered Stanford in 1892 where he eventually received an A. B. in Economics and a M. S. in Zoology. The routine and restraint of the laboratory was never Billy's style, however. Throughout his college career, he remained the consummate field biologist, leading trips into the wilds of California, Arizona and Baja California, usually with other Stanford students.

It was a trip to the Huachuca Mountains in May of 1893 that is of most concern to our subject. Price with two other Stanford students, Ray Wilbur and Malcolm Anderson, loaded their field gear on a train in Los Angeles destined for Tucson. It was a hot, dirty trip and by the time they arrived, the train seats were covered with a quarter inch of dust. At the station they met Herbert Brown, editor of a Tucson newspaper,

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who also happened to be a birder. Brown told them about the particularly lush habitat around old Fort Lowell and suggested that they spend some time there before continuing on to the Huachucas. Following his suggestion, Price and his field crew set up camp among the broken down adobe buildings there and collected along the willow-lined stream and within the nearby Saguaro forest. In addition to collecting a wide variety



Figure 2. John Van Denburgh, Curator at California Academy of Sciences, 1895 to 1924. Van Denburgh knew Billy Price and in 1895, described *Crotalus pricei* in his honor. (Photograph from California Academy of Sciences Archives).

of birds and mammals, they averaged half dozen rattlesnakes a day and saw numerous Gila monsters at the site. Finally after six weeks, they packed up and headed for their original destination, the Huachuca Mountains.

For the next three months, the party collected both the upper and lower parts of Ramsey Canyon as well as along the San Pedro River. Field work in those days was a demanding occupation. The field party survived on coffee, pancakes, prunes, and whatever game that they could find. Anderson had to drop out and head home after contracting malaria. Bandits were a constant threat. There was some concern about encountering the Apache Kid, who was known to be active in the region (particularly the Chiricahuas). The Kid was a renegade who had escaped from authorities after executing the man responsible for his father's murder. He was never captured but roamed the region throughout the late 1880s and early 1890s, littering his trail with corpses of pursuers. Price's party never encountered the Kid, but they were robbed by Mexican bandits that took everything but their preserved specimens. Somehow they managed to

replace enough gear to continue and were joined by a dentist named Timmerman, who replaced Anderson.

Despite the hardships and problems, Price always remained positive, excited, and optimistic in the field. His enthusiasm was contagious, keeping the other members of the party positive as well. Just being in nature surrounded by the mountain majesty, multi-species of hummingbirds, Trogons, Painted redstarts, Vermilion and Sulfur-bellied flycatchers, Gould's turkeys, and Coues whitetailed deer was worth any hardship. At the end of their tour, they had obtained a large and diverse collection of vertebrates that they proudly turned over to Stanford. Within this collection, among what they estimated to be "a dozen or thirteen varieties of rattlesnakes," were five specimens of a small dual-spotted snake that became the type series of *Crotalus pricei*.

Price continued his collecting expeditions until 1899 when he became a teacher at Thatcher boy's school. The next year he married Bertha Laguna, a former student at Stanford. Throughout the remainder of his life, Billy Price ran camps and schools for boys. The central idea of both was to expose boys to nature and to teach them self-reliance and initiative through outdoor experiences.

With his ability to infect others with his enthusiasm and love of nature, few persons could have been better suited to this profession than Billy Price. He died in 1922 after several years of fighting Bright's disease and a weakened heart. Price's name lives on in science in binomials and trinomials of several vertebrates: the Yaqui catfish, *Ictalurus pricei*, the Mexican stoneroller, *Campostoma pricei*; a subspecies of the Desert pocket-mouse, *Perognathus penicillatus pricei*; and, of course, *Crotalus pricei*, a diminutive serpent donning a dual-dotted dorsum.

SOURCES

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Errata:

Carl Kauffeld's name was misspelled in SH 16 (9), 2003 article on *Crotalus willardi*. I hang my head in shame. EOM.

Editor's errata:

September's *Patronym* article (*Crotalus willardi*) was mistakenly labeled as number 'III' when in fact it was number 'IV' in the series. I too hang my head. Apologies to the author.