

Blacksnakes Versus Moles

By D. I. SEWALL

WHICH do you prefer on your golf course — the Blacksnake, which is friendly and helpful, or the Mole which is a pest and destructive?

The writer several weeks ago made an examination of a piece of property upon which it was contemplated building an 18-hole golf course, in Virginia.

The topography of this property was ideal for golfing purposes; bounded on one side by a creek of good size and having several small streams running diagonally through the property. In walking through the woods where there was rather a dense undergrowth, the writer was rather startled as he almost stepped upon a large snake, from three and one-half to four feet in length, and upon asking his associate whether he wanted to kill the snake, received the answer that if it was a Moccasin, yes, but if it was a Blacksnake it ought not to be killed.

There is grave doubt that golfers would enjoy playing over a course inhabited by such venomous reptiles as the Moccasin, and perhaps there is also grave doubt that they would even countenance Blacksnakes. At the same time, Blacksnakes in practically every section of the United States and along the Canadian border are a decided asset to a golf course, rather than a detriment.

The Blacksnake in color is of a lustrous pitch black above and slate color beneath, which is sometimes tinged with greenish white. Specimens from the West and Southwest tend to have more or less a greenish white, bright yellow color beneath, and for this reason are sometimes called Blue or Green Racers.

The Blacksnake is one of the most vigorous of American snakes and rarely exceeds 6 feet in length. He is swift in running, an expert climber, scaling trees 50 feet or more

in height, and is a swift and powerful swimmer.

In Winter they hide away in hollow stumps and underground dens and remain torpid until Spring. The female which is slightly larger than the male, breeds during the Summer and lays from 15 to 20 eggs in dry sandy hollows in banks or sometimes in the dry dust of decaying stumps. They seek much of their food along rivers and swamps. This food consists of frogs, toads, other snakes and small mammals, and unfortunately they are very fond of birds and their young and are great robbers of nests.

There is one fact which is a decided asset and that is that they have a great animosity for Copperheads and Rattlesnakes, and where you have Blacksnakes you very seldom, if ever, find any of the other two just mentioned. This snake is easily tamed and yet we doubt if the average golfer would care to have one as a pet. They can be readily trained and yet we have never seen one trained to the point where he would make a good caddy. They are very useful around a golf course, as they will keep down Moles, Field Mice and small pests.

Some years ago the writer played over a small 9-hole golf course in Litchfield County, Connecticut, where to the right of the first fairway a Blacksnake had reared his family for a number of years. We do not know to this day whether golf balls provided one source of their food or not, yet he knows that no ball played within two or three feet of this pile of rocks ever was retrieved by the player and always disappeared in a very mysterious manner. There never had been seen on this particular course, a Mole, Ground Squirrel or Field Mouse of any description.

Therefore, do not kill a Blacksnake, for he is friendly to you and is harmless if not antagonized.