

**73.—DESCRIPTION OF AN EEL-LIKE CREATURE TAKEN IN A NET
AT NEW HARBOR, MAINE, IN 1880.***

By S. W. HANNA.

In August, 1880, the following item appeared in the Sea-Side Press :

"S. W. Hanna, of Pemaquid, caught what might be called a young sea-serpent in his nets the other day. It was about 25 feet long and 10 inches in diameter in the largest part, and was shaped like an eel. The head was flat, and the upper part projected out over the mouth, which was small and contained sharp teeth. It was dead when found."

Mr. Allen noticed this newspaper item, and, having written to Mr. Hanna inquiring whether there was any truth in it, was favored with the following reply :

"The report you saw in the Press in regard to a marine monster being caught by me was correct. The fish was about 25 feet in length and from 8 to 10 inches in diameter, with a tail like an eel. The skin was not like a scale-fish, but more like a dog-fish or shark, though a great deal finer in quality. I did not save the fish for the reason that I did not know what I had caught. In fact, I considered it a streak of ill-luck rather than good fortune, having torn my nets very badly and otherwise bothering me in my business. The fish could have been grappled twenty-four hours after, it being in only 4 fathoms of water and it being a small shoal, with deep water all around it. A storm arose later, which made it impossible to do so.

"NEW HARBOR, MAINE, *September 14, 1880.*"

Upon receipt of the above, Mr. Allen made a more specific inquiry, as follows :

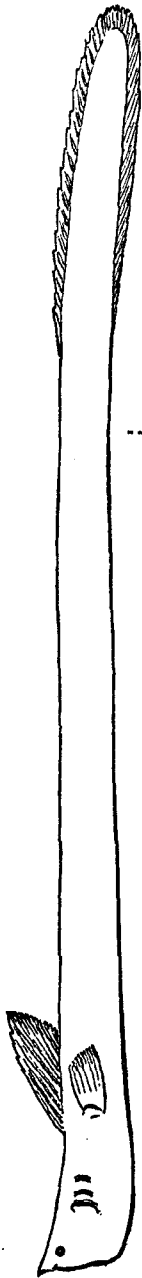
"I am inclined to think that you caught a rare fish or animal, and I am interested to know more about it. Will you please inform me about its head? Was it like a snake's head? Did the mouth open like a snake's mouth? Were there any gills? Were there any fins near the head? Were there any fins on the back? Will you please draw with a pencil the general shape of the head and also the general shape of the whole body? I do not wish to give you too much trouble, but I think such a description is important.

"HARTFORD, CONN., *September 17, 1880.*"

* This account has been compiled from correspondence which passed between Mr. Hanna and J. M. Allen, of Hartford, Conn., and subsequently between Mr. Hanna and Professor Baird. The attention of the latter was called to the matter by Mr. Allen.—C. W. S.

Meanwhile Mr. Allen had written to Professor Baird, who also addressed a series of questions to Mr. Hanna. Under date of September 22 Mr. Hanna replied, giving the same in substance to both Mr. Allen and Professor Baird. The letter to the latter was as follows:

“To the first question I answer, yes. From the head to the tail (exclusive of the head) it did look very much like an eel. Second, the body was round or very near that form. From the head (exclusive of the same) toward the tail was about 12 or 15 feet. The tail was like that of a common eel. Third, the color of its back was of a slate or fish color; belly, grayish-white. Fourth, there were two fins, one on either side, a little abaft the head. They were not stiff-pointed fins like the shark or sword-fish, but more like the side-fins of the cod or sun-fish, only they were in size to correspond with the fish. The top or dorsal fin was like the corresponding fin on the cod. I do not know whether it was stationary or closed, like the top fin of the mackerel and other fish of the same species. To the fifth question I answer, no. All the fins there were on the tail were like those of the eel. Sixth, no. Seventh, there was no projection, elevation, or crest forward of the dorsal fin. The skin was like that of the dog, but very much finer. The head did resemble that of the shark, only more stunted, *i. e.*, it did not lengthen out like the shark's. It looked more like the head of the sucker. The mouth was very small, not any larger than the mouth of a good-sized dog-fish, with fine, briery teeth, and located at the extreme end of the head or nose. The fish was dead when caught. Its mouth was open, and the smallness and location of the same attracted my attention more than any other part of the fish. Inclosed you will find a drawing, as near as I can recollect, of the fish.



"Sea Serpent S. W. Hanna's Sketch"

Length 24 ft

Diameter 10 in.

Diameter 8 in.

"NEW HARBOR, ME., September 22, 1880."

On receipt of this letter and the drawing, Professor Baird made the following further inquiry:

"I notice you mark three strokes on the side of the neck as in the shark. Was this the case, or was there a small opening covered by a flap as in ordinary fish? I do not quite understand whether the snout projected beyond the mouth or not, or whether the mouth is in the under part of the head, or in the upper.

"Was there anything in the tail of the fish bearing a resemblance to that of the shark, or did you consider that the resemblance to the eel was more decided?

"You made a distinct fin just back of the head, while the third of the fish towards the tail has a fin running along the back and around on the under side. Does this correspond with your recollection?

"It is a matter of great interest to determine what the fish was. It was apparently something entirely new.

"WASHINGTON, D. C., *September 24, 1880.*"

Mr. Hanna then replied as follows:

"The three strokes on the side of the neck in the drawing are correct, corresponding with those of the shark. As regards the mouth, the upper part of the head did project a very little, but not more than from half an inch to an inch. The projection was not so great as in the shark, whose snout projects so that the mouth is cut off half the distance of the head back.

"There was nothing in the tail that had any resemblance to that of the shark. The inference that I drew from your letter is that I caught what the fishermen know as the swingle-tail shark, but such was not the case. I am a fisherman of twenty-five years' experience, and am acquainted with about every species of fish from the capes of Virginia to French Saint Peters [Saint Pierre, off Newfoundland], and I never saw a fish that resembled that one entirely. The shark family is very numerous in the waters of Maine, and there is hardly a day that we do not come in contact with them in some form or other. The swingle-tail is not very plenty here. I have caught one in my day, and have seen a half-dozen. The nurse-fish or liver-shark is another kind. It is a bottom fish, and rarely if ever comes to the surface. There is another member of the shark family that inhabits these waters, but is very scarce, having a shark's head, and the rest of the body like dog-fish.

The tail of this strange fish corresponds in the drawing with my recollection. Being dead, I examined it some ten or fifteen minutes, hesitating whether to tow it to land or let it go. I decided if I landed it I should lose \$20 that day in my business, and so could not afford to bother with it. If I had been nearer to Boston or New York, probably I should have saved it.

"NEW HARBOR, ME., *September 27, 1880.*"

The closing item of this correspondence was by Professor Baird, who, in thanking Mr. Hanna on September 29, said: "I am puzzled more than ever in regard to the fish. I would gladly have given a larger sum than you mention if I could have had it. Is it possible that any portion—the head, or even any of the bones—could yet be procured, as they would help to identify it? If any portion should be found, I would be glad to have it sent to me." Nothing further was heard from Mr. Hanna on the subject.

74.—DO STRIPED BASS (*ROCCUS LINEATUS*) FEED ON MENHADEN.

By GIDEON MOSHER.

[From replies to questions in a pamphlet furnished by Joseph Church, and entitled "The menhaden question."]

Striped bass do not feed upon live menhaden, but upon crabs and lobsters. I have been engaged in the bass fishery for 45 years, 30 or 40 years of which I have been in the habit of preparing bass for market. I have prepared tens of thousands of them, but never found any menhaden in them, unless it had been fed to them for bait. My experience extends over the entire range of coast from Mononomy to Beavertail and from Baltimore to Cape Cod. I have found bass most numerous in the Chesapeake Bay, which I attribute to the great quantity of crabs found there. I have always observed that bass fishing was best where lobsters and crabs were most plentiful. My particular locality for taking bass has been at West Island, R. I., and for more than thirty years I never observed or heard of bass feeding on or troubling menhaden, and my business has brought me in contact with many of the most successful menhaden fishermen. I have never heard of but two bass being taken in a purse seine. The bass is a shore and bottom fish.

The absence or the presence of menhaden on the coast does not affect the bass fishery, except in the difference it makes in having or not having fresh bait. You cannot catch bass with stale bait. If the menhaden this year are as far from the coast as they were last year, those taken at Sandy Hook carried to a factory and from there transshipped will be unfit for bait. The only way to do would be to put an experienced man on board the menhaden fishing steamer and ice them alive in the way the bank fishermen treat them. In that way one could make them fit for bait for a month.*

TIVERTON, R. I., *December 26, 1882.*

*The sworn statement of Mr. Mosher is also indorsed by Charles W. Anthony, Edward C. Smith, Ebenezer Owen, Edward Smith, George M. Crabb, William M. Record, and Thomas Record, all bass fishermen of Newport, R. I.