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ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

I.—NOTE ON A NEARLY PERFECT SKELETON OF *ICHTHYOSAURUS*
TENUIROSTRIS FROM THE LOWER LIAS OF STREET, SOMERSET.

By R. LYDEKKER, B.A., F.G.S., F.Z.S., etc.

(PLATE IX.)

SOME ten years ago Mr. Alfred Gillett observed in a quarry of the Lower Lias near his residence at Overleigh, Street, Somerset, a number of broken slabs of shaly limestone, containing portions of the skeleton of an Ichthyosaur. These slabs, which had been cast aside by the workmen, were fitted together by Mr. Gillett, who finally succeeded, after the expenditure of great pains, in skillfully developing from them an almost entire example of the skeleton of *Ichthyosaurus tenuirostris*, Conybeare.

With his usual liberality Mr. Gillett presented this remarkably beautiful specimen to the Geological Department of the British Museum (Natural History) in 1884, where it is now exhibited on the east wall of Gallery No. XI, forming one of the most striking objects in the fine series of Reptilian remains from the English Lias.¹

The gift of this specimen to the Museum was particularly opportune, since the collection, although rich in some of the other species of the genus, was previously but poorly supplied with examples of *Ichthyosaurus tenuirostris*; and is even now widely distanced in this respect by the Dublin Museum of Science and Art. Mr. Gillett's specimen, of which we give a figure in Plate IX., although by no means a large example of the species, is one of the best preserved skeletons that have ever come under our notice. The animal lies on its ventral surface, with the back exposed and the limbs symmetrically expanded on either side; and it is largely due to the symmetrical position in which it has been preserved that the beauty and apparently unusual perfection of the specimen are due. Almost the only damage that the skeleton has sustained consists of some crushing of the skull, and the loss of a few of the tail vertebræ, and of some of the small bones of the paddles.

The fortunate rescue of this interesting specimen by Mr. Gillett affords a good instance of the value of local observers in preserving rare fossils which would be otherwise totally lost.

We may remind our readers that the species before us is not a typical representative of the genus *Ichthyosaurus*, of which the

¹ The specimen is referred to in the Museum Catalogue of Fossil Reptiles, pt. 2, p. 84, No. R. 498 (1889).

normal forms are *I. communis* and *I. intermedius*. In those species the front paddles are characterized by their great width, and the large number of longitudinal rows of ossicles entering into their composition. In the group represented by *I. tenuirostris*, on the other hand, the paddles are much narrower and longer, and have fewer rows of ossicles. Thus, as is well shown in our figure, the third digit, or the one taking origin from the intermedium of the carpus, consists of only a single row of ossicles; and there are usually only four rows of these ossicles in the entire limb, against seven or eight in the typical groups. Moreover, the radius—the bone lying immediately below the humerus on the front side of the limb—is a nearly square bone, with a notch on its front border; whereas in the typical group it is much wider and longer, and has no such notch.

All these characters indicate that the group represented by *I. tenuirostris* is much less specialized than the typical one, and thereby less widely differentiated from more ordinary reptiles. Indeed, so different is the structure of the paddles in *I. tenuirostris* and *I. communis*, that if we had these alone to deal with there could be but little hesitation in regarding the former as the representative of a distinct genus. Unfortunately (or perhaps our purely geological readers would prefer to say fortunately), however, there are certain intermediate forms which render it much more difficult to define such genera; so that for the present at least our species may rest in the genus to which it was referred by its original describer.

The specific characters of the present species are to be found in its long and slender rostrum, narrow fluted teeth, and the presence of a notch on the hinder border of the coracoid. Specimens in the British Museum with the rostrum still more elongated than ordinary were separated by Sir R. Owen as *I. longirostris*, but these proved to be identical with the earlier *I. latifrons* of König. The magnificent series of specimens from the Lower Lias of Barrow-on-Soar in the Dublin Museum indicates, however, that these variations are not of specific value, so that all these forms should apparently be referred to *I. tenuirostris*.

We may conclude this notice by calling attention to a point where the British Museum Catalogue is in error. It appears from the recent researches of Dr. E. Fraas that the type of *I. acutirostris*, Owen, has smooth carinated teeth, like those of *I. platyodon*, so that this species should be transferred to the Platyodont group, which it has been proposed to raise to generic rank as *Temnodontosaurus*. This leaves the name *I. quadriscissus* as the one best applicable to the other specimens catalogued as *I. acutirostris*. Moreover, Dr. Fraas considers that *I. zetlandicus*, Seeley, is identical with *quadriscissus*; and we are disposed to doubt the right of separating *I. longirostris*, Jäger (*non* Owen) from the same. Finally, we observe with satisfaction that Dr. Fraas is disposed to consider the American *Baptanodon* as inseparable from *Ophthalmosaurus* of the English Oxford and Kimeridge Clays, of which such a fine series has recently been acquired by the British Museum.