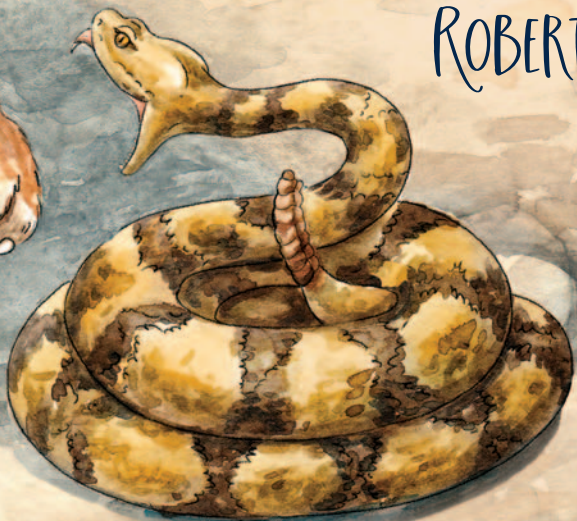


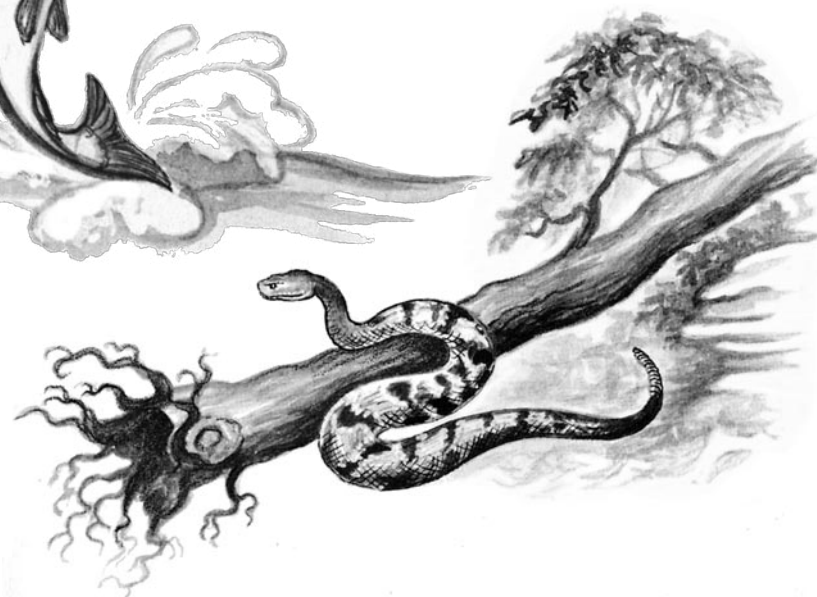
ROBERT M. McCLUNG



BUZZTAIL
and
LEAPER

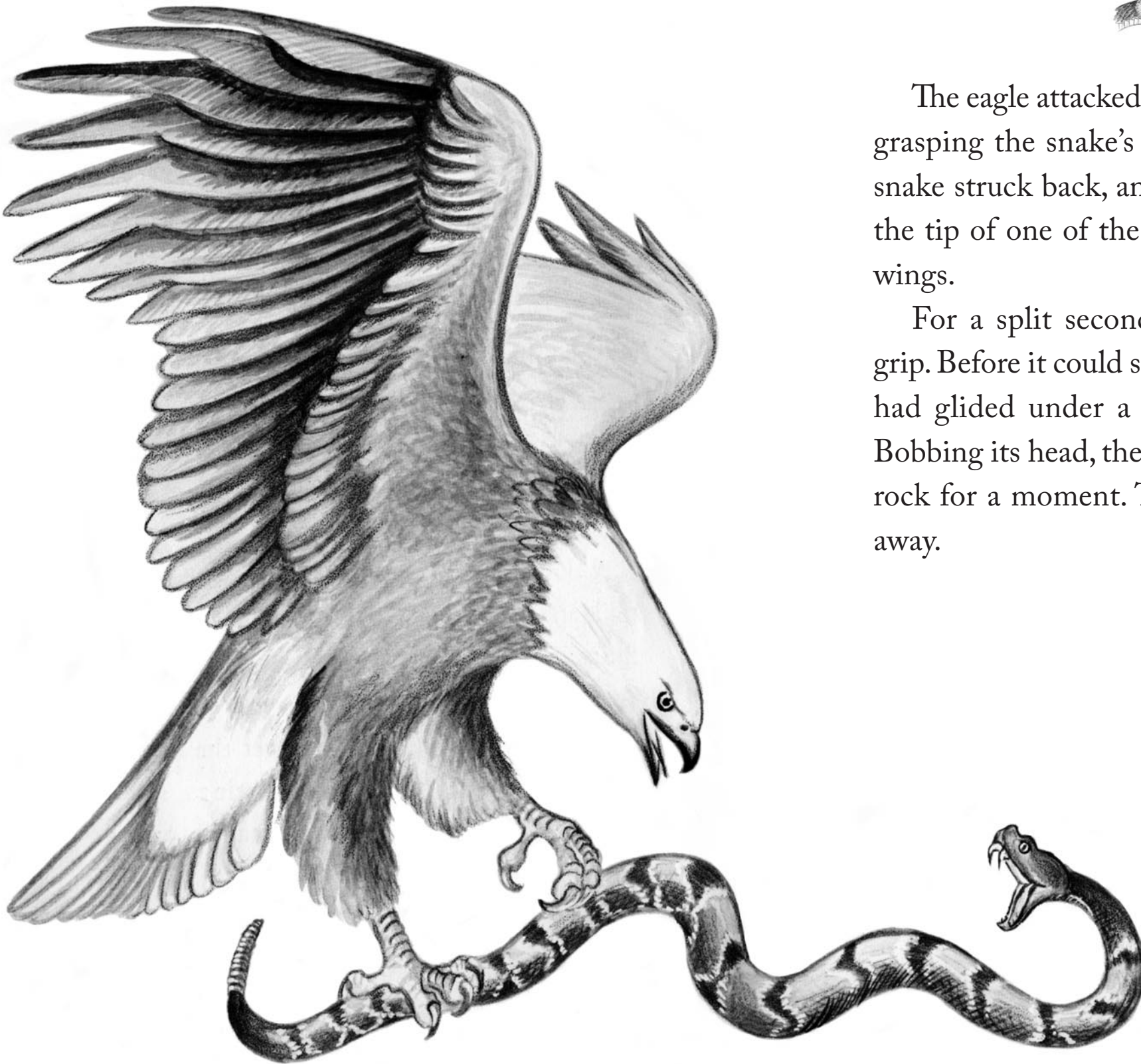


BUZZTAIL
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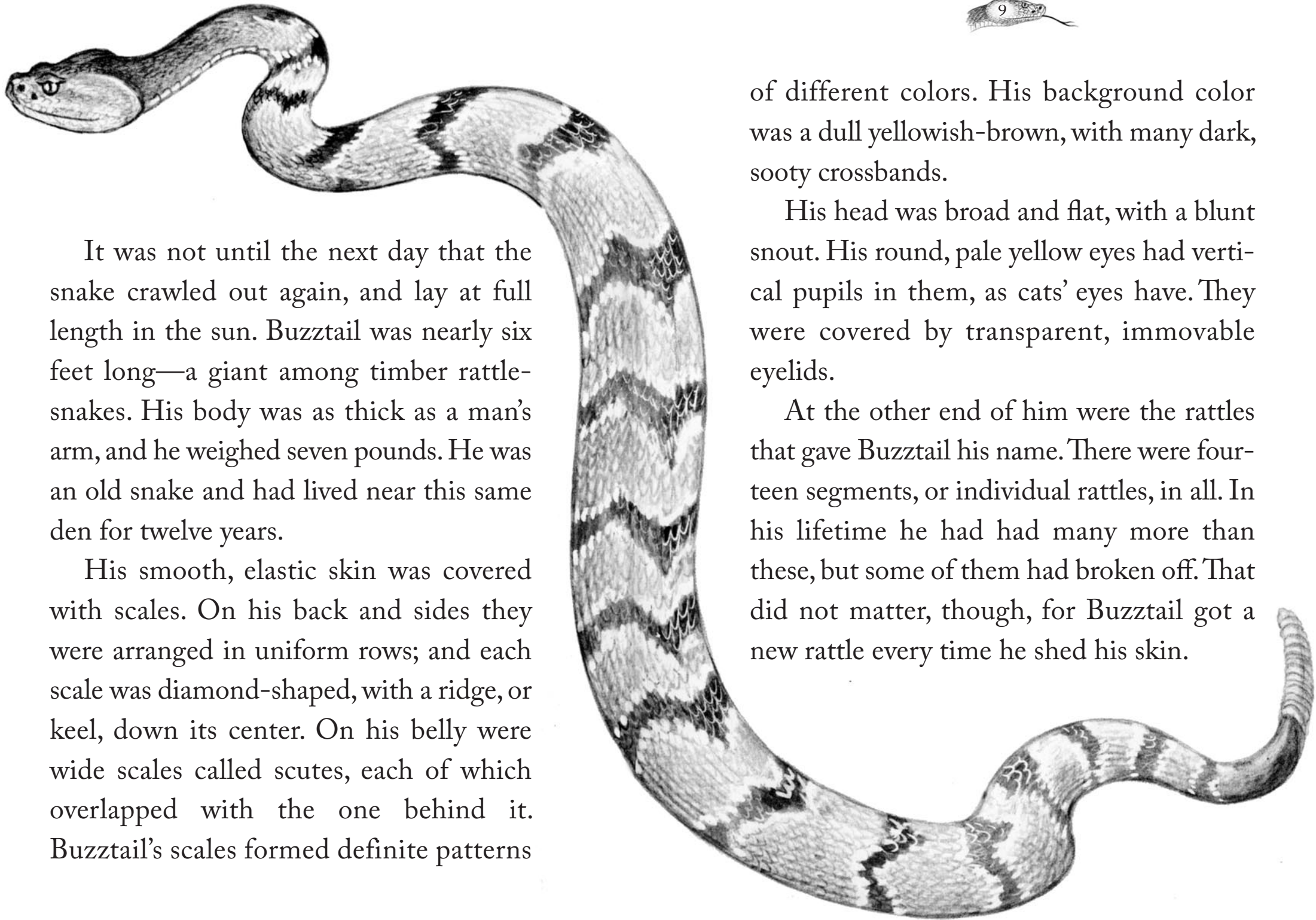
written and illustrated by
ROBERT M. McCLUNG

Purple House Press
Kentucky



The eagle attacked quickly, its sharp talons grasping the snake's middle. Surprised, the snake struck back, and his fangs just grazed the tip of one of the eagle's rapidly beating wings.

For a split second the eagle relaxed its grip. Before it could seize the snake again, he had glided under a big overhanging rock. Bobbing its head, the eagle peered under the rock for a moment. Then it flapped heavily away.



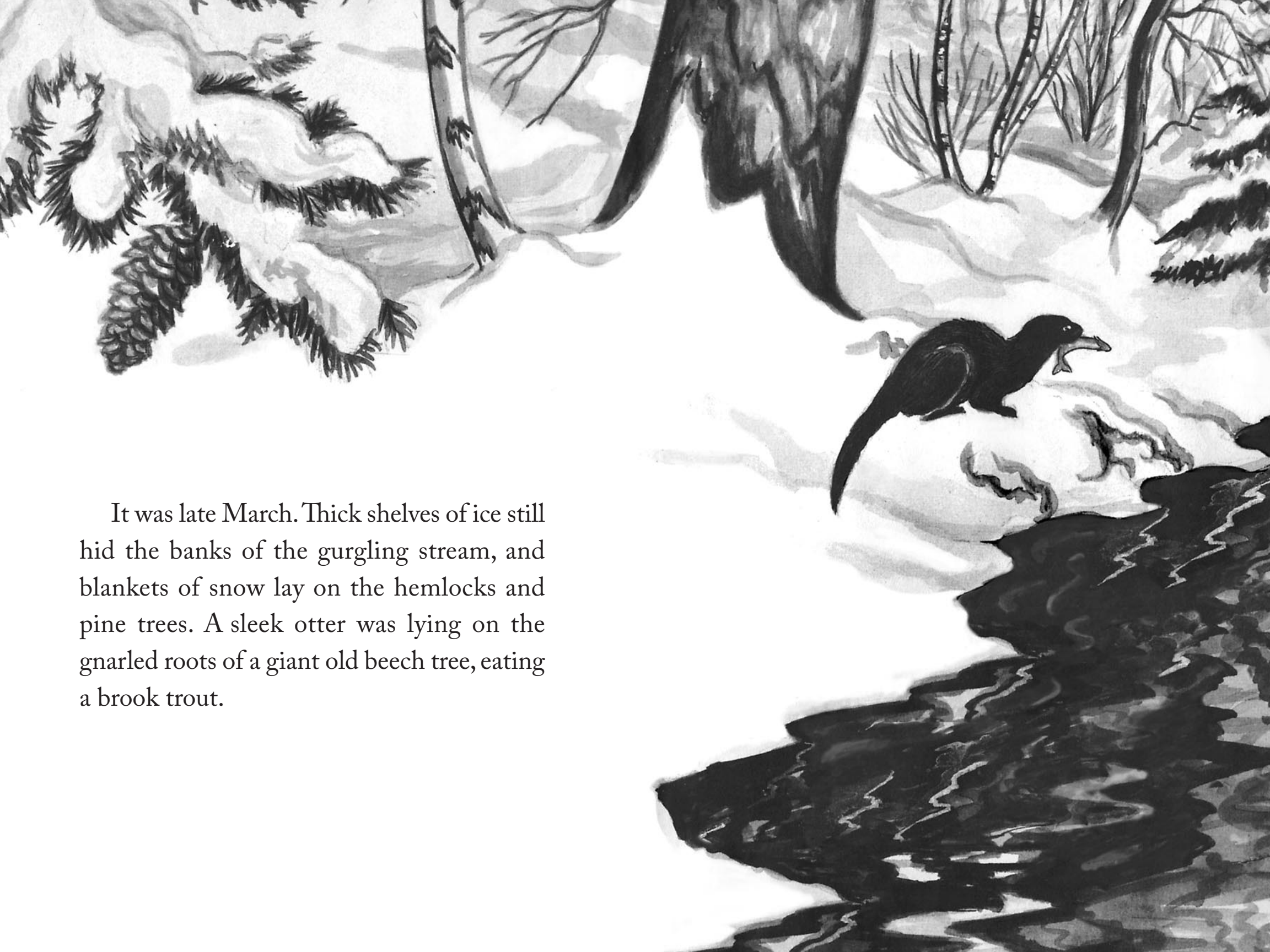
It was not until the next day that the snake crawled out again, and lay at full length in the sun. Buzztail was nearly six feet long—a giant among timber rattlesnakes. His body was as thick as a man's arm, and he weighed seven pounds. He was an old snake and had lived near this same den for twelve years.

His smooth, elastic skin was covered with scales. On his back and sides they were arranged in uniform rows; and each scale was diamond-shaped, with a ridge, or keel, down its center. On his belly were wide scales called scutes, each of which overlapped with the one behind it. Buzztail's scales formed definite patterns

of different colors. His background color was a dull yellowish-brown, with many dark, sooty crossbands.

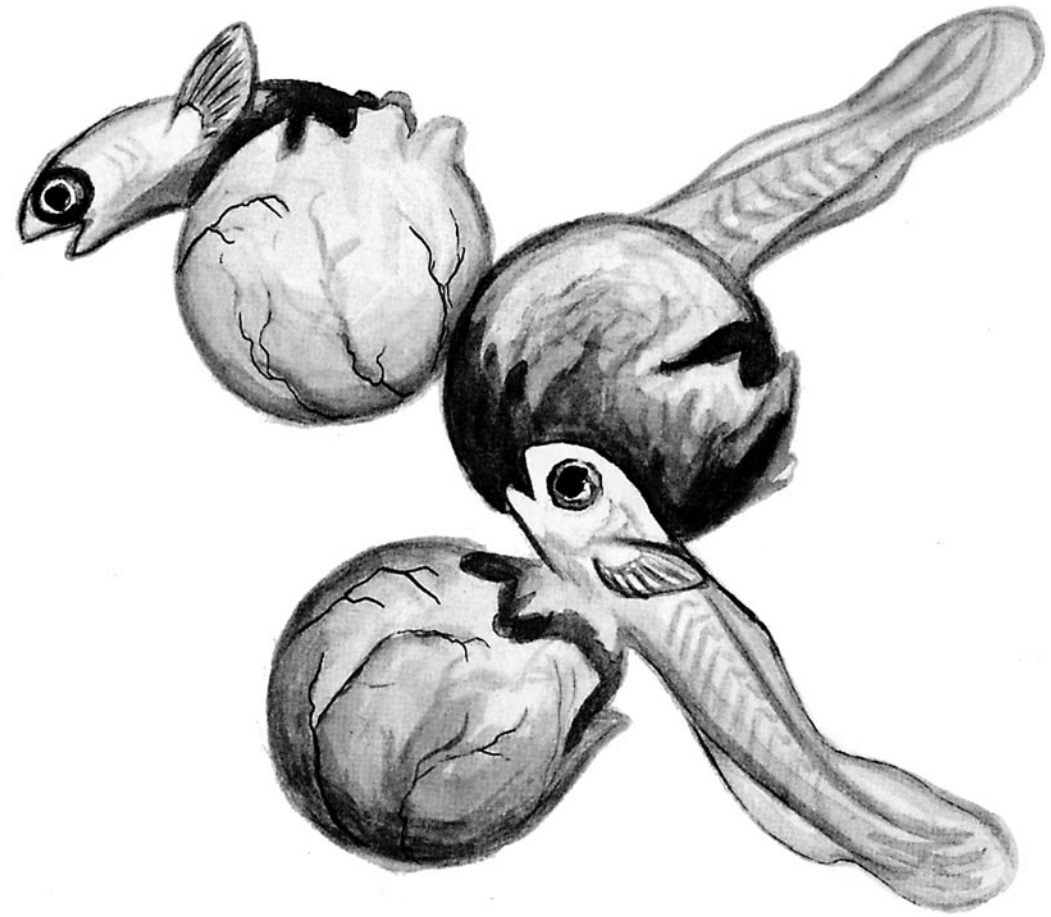
His head was broad and flat, with a blunt snout. His round, pale yellow eyes had vertical pupils in them, as cats' eyes have. They were covered by transparent, immovable eyelids.

At the other end of him were the rattles that gave Buzztail his name. There were fourteen segments, or individual rattles, in all. In his lifetime he had had many more than these, but some of them had broken off. That did not matter, though, for Buzztail got a new rattle every time he shed his skin.



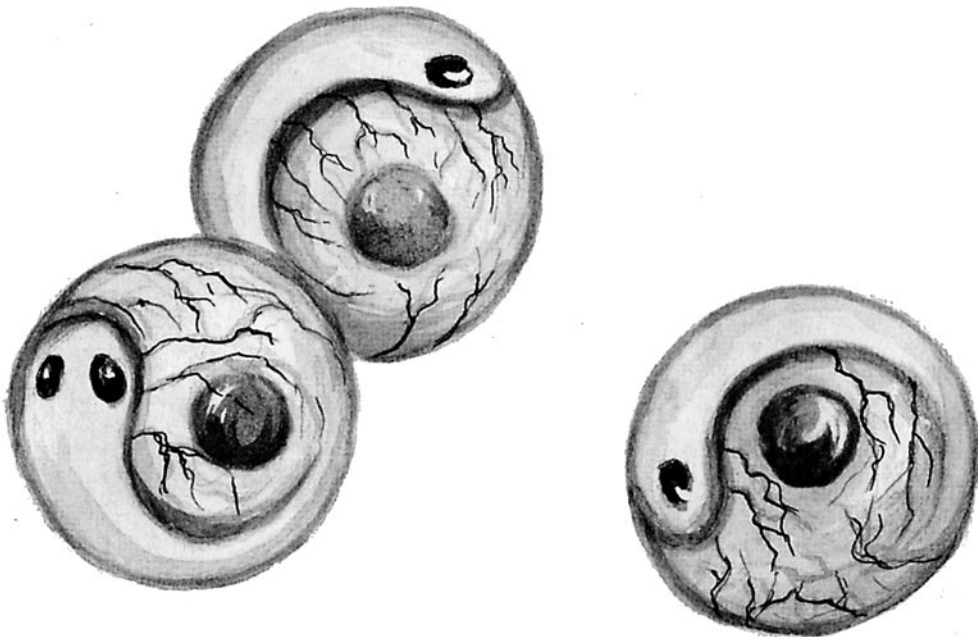
It was late March. Thick shelves of ice still hid the banks of the gurgling stream, and blankets of snow lay on the hemlocks and pine trees. A sleek otter was lying on the gnarled roots of a giant old beech tree, eating a brook trout.

Below, the water flowed clear and fast, two feet deep over a clean gravel bottom. Hidden under the protective gravel were thousands of pale pink eggs, each about as big as a pea, and just at round. They had been there since the middle of November, almost four months before. They were salmon eggs. Two black specks showed through the shell of each egg—the eyes of the tiny fish that was growing inside.



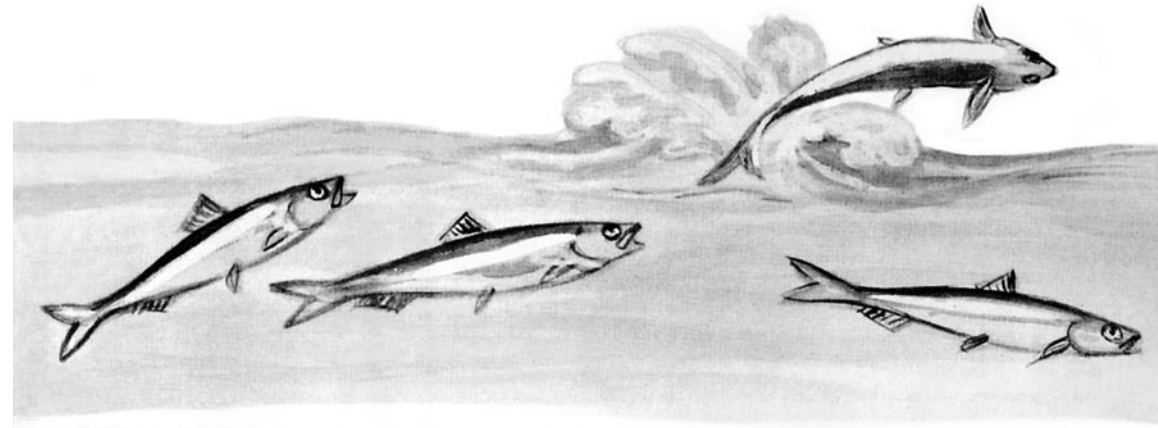
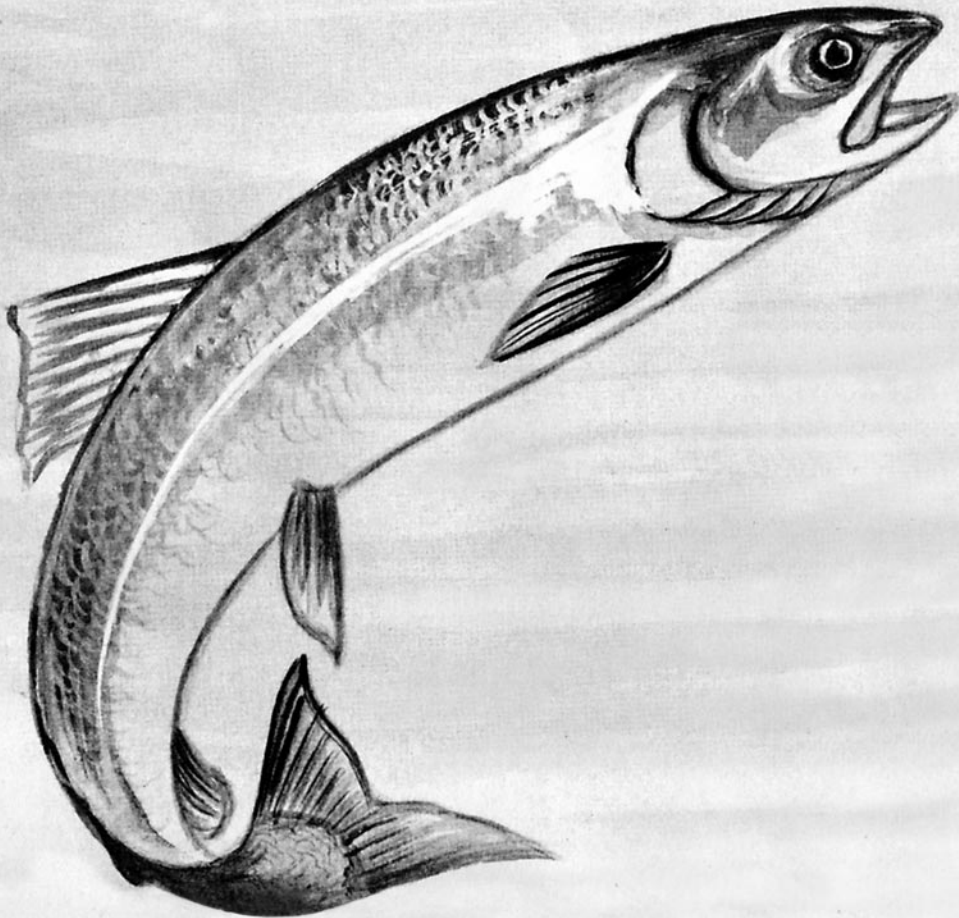
In early April the salmon eggs began to hatch. Some of the little fish broke through the tough rubbery shells headfirst. Others popped through tailfirst.

Leaper twisted inside his egg. His tail broke through the shell. Next his back broke through, and finally his head.



When spring came, with its increasing abundance of life in the water, Leaper ate all he could hold every day. He was getting to be a big fish, nearly sixteen inches long now.

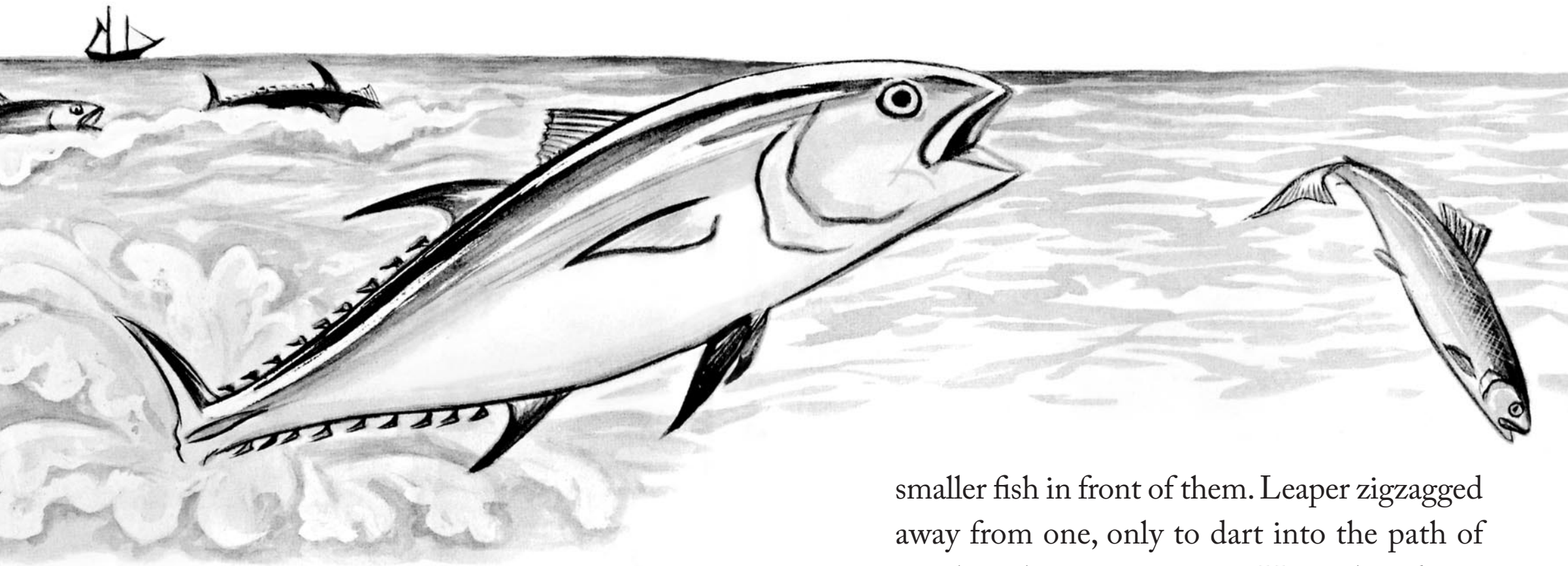
He constantly searched for the best feeding grounds, and followed the vast schools of herring wherever they went. He charged among them, scattering the slender silvery



fish in all directions, snapping his sharp teeth down on one twisting victim after another. All summer long he gorged himself on the rich firm flesh of the smaller fish.

By the end of his second summer in the sea, Leaper had wandered over six hundred miles from the mouth of his home river. He was twenty-eight inches long now, and weighed fourteen pounds.

No matter how big he grew, however, there were always many bigger animals in the sea. Hungry dolphins plunged into the depths after him. So did huge sharks, their open mouths lined with razor-sharp teeth. They would eat him if they could catch him.



Leaper blundered into a school of tuna that year. Some of these giant fish were over seven feet long, and weighed five hundred pounds or more. They had come from the south, following the schools of mackerel that were their principal food.

The great fish zoomed through the foaming water like gleaming meteors, chasing all the

smaller fish in front of them. Leaper zigzagged away from one, only to dart into the path of another charging monster. He rocketed upward, away from the wide yawning jaws. His twisting body broke water, flashing in the sunlight as he leaped into the air.

A few feet behind him, the tuna's great body churned the water into a boiling spray, as it surfaced too. Leaper fell back into the waves and was gone before the tuna could find him again.

ATLANTIC SALMON FACTS

(*Salmo salar*)

The name *salar* comes from the Latin *salio* which means "to leap". Atlantic salmon can leap waterfalls up to 15 feet high.

In the US, Atlantic salmon are protected since they are in danger of extinction. The US Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA¹ Fisheries and the Penobscot Nation have recovery and management plans in place.

Commercial fishing of Atlantic salmon ended in 1947. Salmon fly fishing became catch and release only in the 1990s, and all fishing ceased in 1999, when the Atlantic salmon was placed on the US endangered species list.

In North America, their range extends from Maine to northern Quebec.

Average length: 28 to 30 inches, the maximum reported length is 59 inches.

Average weight: 8 to 12 pounds, with a maximum reported weight of 103 pounds.

Average lifespan: 2 to 7 years, with the oldest reported salmon being 13 years of age.

A female lays approximately 7500 eggs, or about 750 eggs per pound of body weight.



BUZZTAIL was nearly six feet long—a giant among timber rattlesnakes. He was an old snake and had lived near the same den for twelve years. This vivid account of one year in his life conveys a wealth of information about the timber rattlesnake.

Read along to learn how snakes eat prey that is larger than themselves, how their skin is shed and new rattles are formed, and how Buzztail cleverly survives many dangers.

LEAPER broke out of his pale pink egg late in March. For two years he fed and grew in his quiet pool, then began his journey to the sea. The rushing current swept him downstream, past dangerous foes and through city-polluted water. At last Leaper entered the ocean, but there were dangers here too—sharks, schools of tuna, and the trolling lines of fishing boats.

Three years passed before Leaper felt the urge to return to the stream where he had hatched. Now he faced a difficult challenge as he drove through gill nets, over ten-foot falls, up fish ladders, while battling the current to reach his old home.

ROBERT McCLUNG'S nature study books are set against a living background whose fields and woods, rivers and seas, and the changing seasons are described and pictured with imagination as well as realism.

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1. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration