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## Department of Reptiles: Annual Report 1884

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U.S. National Museum,

Smithsonian Institution,

Washington, D.C.

January, 5th. 1885.

Prof. G. Brown Goode.

Asst. Director, Nat. Mus.

Sir:

In accordance with directions received in your circular of December 4th. 1884, I have the honor to submit the following report of the operations in the Department of Reptiles, U.S. National Museum, under my charge.

During the past year as in previous years the Department of Reptiles has been abundantly favored by many contributors whose interest in Herpetology has led them to make valuable and extensive collections, and both the reserve and general series have been consequently much enlarged and made more valuable for purposes of comparison and study. Among the most noteworthy of the donations received, may be mentioned the following. From Capt. Chas. Bendire, U.S.A., who for many years has been a most devoted friend to the establishment, has been received a large and valuable collection from Fort Klamath and vicinity, Washington Ty. From Mr. Chas. H. Townsend, of Baird, Shasta Co. Cal., and extremely interesting collection of the characteristic reptiles of that vicinity. Mr. C. J. Hering, of Surinam, a valuable contributor in previous years has also presented a valuable collection of exotic reptiles, and from the scientific gentlemen of the Fish Commission Steamer, Albatross, a large collection made during the cruise in the West Indies in 1884, comprising over one hundred specimens has also been received. This collection has been loaned by direction of Prof. Baird, to Prof. E. D. Cope, of Phila., for study and identification, the



results of which will be probably embodied in a forthcoming paper by this distinguished naturalist in tropical herpetology. From Lt. Geo. F. Chase, U.S.A., Fort Thomas, Arizona, have been received two living examples of the "Gila Monster", *Heloderma suspectum*, Cope, these having been sent by special request to furnish additional material for Dr. S. Weir Mitchell's research upon the venom of this interesting lizard. Collections have also been received from R. Ellsworth Call, Des Moines, Iowa. A particularly valuable one from E. W. Nelson, Tucson, Arizona.

During the months of August and September, 1884, the Curator being in charge of a small party for scientific research sent out by direction of the present enlightened Secy. of War, had an opportunity of collecting many valuable and interesting specimens of reptiles in the territory of Utah, supplementing in this manner the collections made by him in 1872 while naturalist of Lt. Wheeler's expedition. By permission of the Director of the Museum one of his assistants in the Department of Reptiles was permitted to accompany him, and by permission of Genl. McCook, U.S.A., Lt. B. W. Atkinson, 6th. U.S. Infantry also joined the party, and both gentlemen rendered valuable assistance, and a small appropriation was made to further the objects of the expedition.

Other collections have been received from Jose C. Zelodon of Costa Rica, B. V. Archer, Key West, Florida. Prof. D. S. Jordan, Bloomington, Ind. Dr. B. G. Lartigue of South Carolina. Miss Rosa Smith, San Diego, Cal., James Bell, Gainesville, Fla., John & Chas Walker, Olney, Richland Co., Ill., H. C. Orcutt, San Diego, Cal., R. E. C. Stearns, Auburn, Cal., F. W. Hayden, Canada., Gustave Kohn, New Orleans, La., W. A. Conklin, Supt. Central Park Museum, New York., J. Richardson, Rutland, Vt., D. S. Sheldon, Griswold College, Davenport, Iowa., Chas. R. Orcutt, San Diego, Cal., Chas. H. Townsend, Red Bluff, Cal., H. W. Turner, San Francisco, Cal.



Major G.E.Dobson, Surg. Royal Victoria Hospital, *Netley* England.,  
H.W.Henshaw, Mass., and R.Ridgway, Wheatland, Ind. From this extended  
list it will be seen that the public interest in the Reptile De-  
partment is constantly increasing. We are also under great obli-  
gations to Prof.Snow, of the Kansas Univ., who loaned us a unique  
and beautiful specimen of *Crotalus lepidus*, which has been drawn  
as one of the illustrations for the Manual of Herpetology in course  
of preparation by the curator.

As was mentioned by the Curator in his last  
annual report the routine work of the Department has been trans-  
acted by himself and two young assistants, both of whom are al-  
ready possessed of considerable knowledge regarding reptiles. The  
ordinary business necessitating constant labor being as follows.  
All collections received are at once numbered with a metallic tag  
and entered in the accession book, having been previously identi-  
fied if possible. They are then after a careful examination placed  
in either the reserve or general series, an additional record being  
made in order that in case a specimen is needed it may be at once  
found according to its classification. In explanation of the terms  
"reserve and general series" it may be said that the entire col-  
lection of American reptiles is divided into two great parts, one  
called the "Reserve Series" intended for purposes of study and com-  
parison, and from which is selected the exhibition set, the other  
entitled the "general Series" from which selections are made for  
donations to other museums or to amplify the "Reserve Series".  
It is to be greatly regretted that proper space is not available  
to admit of a proper display of an exhibit set of both domestic  
and foreign reptiles.

It has long been the intention of the Curator to arrange  
in the same manner the collection of foreign reptiles, but in the



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present crowded condition of the curators room it has been found impossible to do this properly.

The following records in addition to the current record, are kept with great care and exactitude, <sup>and</sup> necessitated by the business of the department which has greatly increased in magnitude during the last five years. These records are as follows.

Record of Reserve Series.

Record of General Series.

Record of Letters received.

Record of Letters sent.

Record of Requisitions.

In these may be found every matter of business transacted in the Department of Reptiles.

No little labor is involved in attending promptly to the official correspondence, which is quite voluminous at times, for letters of enquiry are received from all parts of the world, to answer which require much study, thought and labor. During the year 1884, over two hundred letters were received and answered, and many were written in addition.

The long cherished desire of the Curator to have prepared a card catalogue of the collection of reptiles, is now in a fair way towards realization, as a commencement has been made and over a thousand specimens have been examined, verified and carded, this in view of the regular work which was arduous in 1884 is considered a good beginning.

The manuscript of a Manual of Herpetology (mentioned in last years report) by the curator could be put into the hands of the printer within a short period, if the illustrations were all completed. Owing to a want of funds, further work upon these has been stopped.

No special work has been attempted this year apart from the



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routine duties and field researches.

At the present time the collection is in excellent condition which could be much improved were more space available. Although since Dec. 1st. 1884 the business of the Reptile Department has been closed by the furloughing of both assistants, still constant attention is given, in order that specimens may not perish for want of suitable care.

Number of specimens on hand:

In Reserve Series 8926.

In General Series 8819.

Exhibition Set, (selected for)

Domestic 600.

Foreign 150.

Not classified and exotic specimens, probably 5000

Total 23495.

Total number of entries in Record book 1884. 584.

Total number of specimens received to Jan. 1st. 1885. 1494.

Total number of entries in Record up to Jan. 1st. 1885. 14329.

Since his connection with the National Museum in an Honorary capacity the Curator has repeatedly called attention to the fact that without additional accommodation for his department it would be impossible to so arrange the collection as to make it of much practical value, and it is now with a desponding spirit that he again urges that something may be done for relief. All the available shelf space is overcrowded, specimens have to be placed on the floor or in an adjoining hall and much material that is valuable is hidden away in clumsy tanks, deposited in almost inaccessible corners. To those who have taken a pride in their work and labored assiduously to bring order out of chaos, such a condition of affairs is both disheartening and



fortifying.

While bowing with submission to the order which closed up the active work of the Department of Reptiles on Dec. 1st. 1884, an order necessitated by want of funds, the Curator feels it his duty to respectfully and earnestly urge that it be revoked at the earliest possible moment, and suggests the re-employment of his assistants. These young men have been passing through a period of probationary education to fit them for their duties, and now at the time when their services are most valuable to the Museum, and to the Curator, they are furloughed ~~by~~ without any immediate prospect of their place being filled by others. This simply means that even the routine work must stop, or that the Curator must depend upon voluntary aid to enable him to attend to imperative necessities. Owing to other and important official duties, it is impossible for him to give his entire time to reptilian work and without assistance the Department will gradually merge into the condition it was when he first took charge of it. With becoming deference he thinks this should not be permitted, an enormous amount of work has been expended in the Department, and with pardonable pride, he thinks that under the circumstances it compares most favorably with any of the other Departments in the National Museum.

It must be conceded by all who have looked into this subject that the Reptile Department is of as quite as much importance to the Museum and to the scientific public, as any of the other Departments, and for this reason the Curator again respectfully calls the attention of the Director to his recommendation of last year, that the person in charge should be a salaried officer, and be required to give his entire time to the duties of his office. This the present Curator can-not do, so it will be understood that no motive of self interest prompts him in this suggestion.



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In closing this report the Curator returns his thanks for the courtesy which he has always received, and commends heartily the official conduct of his assistants.

Very respectfully

*L. B. Gannett.*

Hon. Cur. Dept. Rept.