

NUMBER 131

FEBRUARY 10, 1923

OCCASIONAL PAPERS OF THE MUSEUM OF
ZOOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY

THE CROCODILE IN FLORIDA

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That curious genius, Rafinesque, one of the most surprising and versatile of naturalists, by some hook or crook first learned of the existence of a crocodile in Florida. His very short notice is in an excessively rare number of the Kentucky Gazette, of which a photostat copy, made in the Library of Congress, is before me. There is another original copy in the Library at Lexington, Kentucky. I believe Dr. Stejneger first noticed this observation. It consists of a few brief lines only: "Our alligators have not yet been well studied by real Naturalists. I suspect that many species and varieties exist in the Southern states. The most common species is the *Crocodilus lucius* of Cuvier; there is a sharp snout alligator in Florida which must be his *Crocodilus acutus*." (Kentucky Gazette (n. s.), Vol. 1, No. 29, July 18, 1822, p. 3, col. 2.) Rafinesque almost surely had never seen a specimen, yet he made an excellent surmise as to specific identity. The Florida

crocodile was not heard of again until 1869, when the first really scientific record of the American salt-water crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus* Cuv.), occurring within the confines of the United States, appeared in the Proceedings of the Boston Society of Natural History (1869, p. 78). This note records that Dr. Jeffries Wyman exhibited the head of a crocodile, *C. acutus*, obtained from the Miami River where it enters Key Biscayne Bay. The skull was given to Dr. Wyman by a Mr. William H. Hunt, a local resident, and was, he told Dr. Wyman, the second to be killed at that spot. The note concludes by adding that the existence of a true crocodile had not been previously recognized within the limits of the United States. This historic skull is now preserved in the Boston Society of Natural History, labeled by Dr. Wyman himself, and is No. 2,212 of the Wyman Catalogue.

The following year (Amer. Jour. Sci. Arts, 49, 1870, p. 105) Dr. Wyman described in more detail how he happened to secure the skull, and he gives a series of careful measurements. Wyman's friends year after year, one or another, visited Florida with him, for he was impelled annually by ill health to seek a milder winter climate. Mr. George Augustus Peabody, of Danvers, who still lives at Burleigh Farm in Danvers, went with him on many of these journeys, and the opportunities to hear from Mr. Peabody the charming reminiscences of his gifted and whimsical companion will long be looked back upon with pleasure. In 1869, however, Wyman went for what I believe was his only trip to Biscayne Bay when he was a guest of Mr. J. Murray Forbes on board his yacht "The Azalea." Miami then was a tiny settlement of half a dozen houses clustered about Brickell's store, which was located not far from where the Royal Palm Hotel stands now. There was probably not a settlement in the United States that

had less contact with the outer world, and it is not remarkable that the existence of the crocodile in Florida remained known to only the "conchs" of the Florida Keys and to the few white men who, for reasons usually good and sufficient, saw fit to settle or move from place to place about the coast of extreme southern Florida, equally anxious to avoid meeting the half nomadic Seminoles or a better white man with a gun.

Curiously enough, the next record for the crocodile is the most northerly. C. J. Maynard, who knew Wyman and had heard of his discovery, and who was and is a field observer of rarest skill, made a trip in 1872 from the St. John's River to the upper end of the Indian River. Maynard wrote a short account of this journey for *Forest and Stream* (1, 1873, p. 162). This was reprinted as Chapter 1 of *Camp Life in Florida*, which appeared in book form, published by the Forest and Stream Company in 1876, and was edited by Charles Hallock. The little volume, now of real historic interest, contains many short tales of exploring, hunting and fishing in Florida which had had an earlier appearance in the journal. Maynard killed a crocodile over ten feet in length in a creek between Lake Harney and the head of the Indian River. No mention is made of the water being fresh or brackish, but the Indian River is strongly saline and the locality is one to which it would be by no means unlikely for a crocodile to stray. I know of no other definite records for the Indian River, although I have heard rumors of stray crocodiles having wandered to the southern narrows near St. Lucie within the last thirty years. Maynard said that this was the second instance on record of the capture of a true crocodile in the United States. Curiously enough, he misspelled the name in the same way in both the published accounts and thereby added a synonym to the already somewhat complicated

synonymy of the creature. It was *Crocodilus acurus*.

Messrs. C. E. Jackson and W. T. Hornaday killed the next crocodiles on an old slide on the shores of Arch Creek, in Dake County, in 1875: a giant male, 15 feet 2 inches, with half a foot of the tail gone, and a perfect female, 10 feet 8 inches. These were killed on successive days on the same slide and were well cared for. The male still ornaments the United States National Museum in Washington, which, I believe, likewise secured the skeleton of the female. Hornaday found another skull of a dead individual which is, beyond doubt, the one now in the Museum of Comparative Zoology, received from Ward and labeled Biscayne Bay. In the account of the hunt which Hornaday published in 1875 (*Amer. Naturl.*, 9, p. 504) we have the first attempt to give some general account of habits, abundance and distribution. Hornaday speaks of Wyman's having described a skull from Florida and called it *C. acutus*, but not being familiar with the variation within the species, Hornaday was constrained to describe his specimens as representing a new species, *Crocodilus floridanus*. The various specimens which are still preserved are cotypes of this name, no special type having been designated. More material now has shown that there is no diagnostic differentiation of Florida individuals and the name has neither specific nor sub-specific value.

Curiously enough, in later years Hornaday evidently forgot the Wyman notes, for in the *American Natural History* (1904, p. 320) we read: "The presence of a true crocodile in Florida was not discovered until 1875, when a pair of specimens of large size were collected in Arch Creek, at the head of Biscayne Bay, by Mr. C. E. Jackson and the writer." Very probably the fact that Hornaday believed that two species were involved may have led him, in error, to conclude that

Wyman's skull, identified (correctly) as *C. acutus*, really came from elsewhere than Florida. For Hornaday makes it clear that he did not believe that both he and Wyman had the same species, whereas what they had were conspecific individuals of different ages.

The closing chapter will now soon be written and before many years the last Florida crocodile to be recorded will claim historic interest in some museum equal to that now held by Wyman's Miami River skull. Happily, however, the reptile has not wholly lacked biographers. C. B. Cory, in his *Hunting and Fishing in Florida* (Boston, Estes & Lauriat, 1896, p. 70 *et seq.*), devotes a short chapter to notes on crocodiles and gives some fair photographs. In 1918, however, A. W. and Julian Dimock published their well-named *Florida Enchantments* (Outing Publ. Co., 1918, p. 89 *et seq.*). This book contains photographs which are among the finest and most valuable photographic records ever made in natural history.

The crocodile, dwindling yearly in numbers, still may be found by the persistent hunter. About Ojus Creek and in the mangrove sloughs between Hallandale and the ocean beach a fair few still persist, and in February, 1920, a little crocodile was found in a small brackish pool not far from Mr. Michael P. Grace's garden at Palm Beach by some of his grandchildren.

In February, 1919, Paul Clark, a local taxidermist at Palm Beach, got one which was found in Ojus Creek, floating dead after a hard freeze. I saw this animal after it had been badly mounted, and was told that it measured 14 feet 8 inches, but it had evidently been violently stretched. Clark subsequently gained some local renown by dying from the bite of a coral snake with which he had played.

Little crocodiles when first hatched are from nine to ten inches long, a little longer and much more slender than newly-hatched alligators.

The extension of the crocodile's range in southwestern Florida is undefined, and this offers an attractive problem for someone who wishes a real reason to visit a region which is still as wild and isolated as any so near at hand.



Barbour, Thomas. 1923. "The crocodile in Florida." *Occasional papers of the Museum of Zoology, University of Michigan* 131, 1–6.

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