

P R E F A C E .

IN undertaking the present work I was not fully aware of the many difficulties attending it—indeed they could hardly have been anticipated. With an immense mass of materials, without libraries to refer to, and only defective museums for comparison, I have constantly been in fear of describing animals as new that have long been known to European Naturalists. In no department of American Zoology is there so much confusion as in Herpetology. This is to be traced partly to the earlier Naturalists, partly to the practice of describing from specimens preserved in alcohol, or from prepared skins. I have endeavoured to avoid error in this respect, by describing in almost every instance from the living animal, and often after a comparison of many individuals.

I consider myself fortunate in having secured the assistance of so good an artist as Mr. J. SERA, an Italian by birth, but long resident in the United States, who has caught the character and attitude of the animals with singular felicity. The colouring of the plates may be fully relied on, as almost every one was done from life; and when coloured from dead animals, it is always mentioned in the description, so that no one may be deceived.

In presenting the first volume of **NORTH AMERICAN HERPETOLOGY**, I have to return my thanks to those gentlemen who have aided me in the undertaking—and especially to my colleague, **Dr. OGIER**, of Charleston, who is associated with me in my dissections, the result of which will be given in the *Anatomy of the Genera*.

To **Dr. WURDEMAN** and **Dr. BARON**, of Charleston, for many beautiful anatomical preparations, especially of the Chelonian and Saurian animals.

To my friend **Dr. GEDDINGS**, Professor of Surgery in our Medical College, I am greatly obliged for many curious observations on the Reptiles of the low country of Carolina.

To **Dr. HARLAN**, of Philadelphia, for the use of his library and private notes on Reptiles, and for a fine specimen of *Cistuda Carolina*.

To **Dr. BINNEY** and **Dr. STORER**, I owe many thanks for numerous specimens of Reptiles of the northern states, with observations on their habits.

To Professor **TROOST**, of Nashville, Tennessee, for many of the Reptiles of the west, accompanied with valuable observations, as will appear in the progress of the work.

THOMAS M. LOGAN, M. D., formerly of Charleston, now residing in New Orleans, I have to thank for a number of beautiful drawings of Serpents, Salamanders, &c., which will appear in the progress of the work.

TO Miss MARTIN, of Charleston, my thanks are also due, for some accurate and very spirited drawings of Carolina Reptiles.

TO the Reverend JOHN BACHMAN, of Charleston, I am indebted for many interesting remarks on the habits of our Reptiles, particularly those of the Alligator.

I have to thank Professor JACOB GREEN, of the Jefferson Medical College of Philadelphia, perhaps more than any of my friends, for observations on the Ecaudate Batrachian animals, the habits of which family he has investigated with great success; and also for the use of his notes on the Reptiles generally.

CHARLES HAMMOND and OGDEN HAMMOND, Esqs., of West Chester, New York, have also furnished me with beautiful specimens of the *Emys picta*, with remarks on their hibernation.

Major LECONTE has, with a liberality that distinguishes the true lover of nature, rendered me essential service in placing at my disposal his notes on Reptiles, accompanied with beautiful drawings, the labour of many years.

But, above all, I am indebted to Dr. CHARLES PICKERING, of Philadelphia, who has aided me with his accurate knowledge at every step of this work.

The work will be arranged in two parts:—

Part I. treats of the external forms, colour, habits, geographical distribution, &c.

Part II. will embrace the anatomy and physiology of each genus, illustrated with drawings of the different organs.

It would have been better, perhaps, to have given the special anatomy of the animal at the same time with the description of its external characters; but as the work is published by subscription, the plan adopted was thought most advisable, as either part may be had separately.

For the arrangement of the order Chelonia, I have followed that of DUMERIL and BIBRON, and have adopted the genera that they have either received or established in their work, as far as our reptiles are concerned, with one or two exceptions, which will be found in the body of the work.

For the order Sauria I have also chosen the classification of DUMERIL and BIBRON, in preference to that of any other naturalists, and have consequently adopted it as far as it applies to the Saurian animals of the United States, with a few exceptions, and the addition of one new genus, *Crotophytus*, for a western Lizard, which could not be referred to any of theirs.

For the order Ophidia, I have preferred the classification of CUVIER, though I have been obliged to deviate from it in some particulars, either adding such genera as seemed to me necessary, from other naturalists, as WAGLER, BOIE, KÜHL, &c., or establishing new ones.

For the order Batrachia, and class Ecaudata, I have followed generally the classification of DUMERIL and BIBRON, and have received most of their genera as far as they embrace our Reptiles.

For the class Caudata I have adopted in part the arrangement of CUVIER, and in part that of FITZINGER.

A word or two with respect to the use of specific names.—I have endeavoured invariably to retain, with the name of the Naturalist describing it, that by which the animal was first made known. These should always be retained, even if bad, though the generic names may, indeed must, often be changed, according to the light thrown by anatomical investigation upon the affinities that animals bear to each other in their structure and organization. Thus in assigning the *Emys Floridana* to Leconte, I only mean to retain the specific name given by him to a certain animal which he first described; and it is not to be supposed that he established the genus *Emys*, any more than the genus *Testudo*, (*Testudo Floridana*,) to which he refers it.

I have only here to do with species and specific names; in the anatomical part of this work it will be shown why one generic name is preferred to another. In the catalogue of synonymes will be seen not only the different specific names, but also those of the genera under which different Herpetologists have arranged our Reptiles.

The habit adopted by several late Naturalists, of changing the names by which animals were first described, even though for better and more characteristic denominations, has already led to great confusion, and must lead to greater, since few persons are likely to agree in the characters they think most important.

“The discoverers of new species have the undoubted right of imposing the names, (specific,) and these ought never to be altered. They may have a harsh sound, be barbarous, or even absurd; yet all these objections are as nothing when compared with the evils accompanying the multiplication of synonymes. Even without any good reason many Naturalists have presumed to change the names which the discoverer of the species imposed upon them, in order to obtain what appears to them uniformity of nomenclature, or rather for the purpose of increasing their own importance.

“The period is probably not very remote, when this mischievous spirit of innovation shall receive an effectual check, in consequence of credit being attached only to those who develop new characters, and not to those who disturb science by the fabrication of new names.”

It was my intention on beginning this work, to have included in it descriptions of several new Reptiles, brought from the Oregon Territory and country south of the Columbia river, by Mr. TOWNSEND the Ornithologist, which he kindly placed at my disposal; but having brought them in alcohol, their colours are so much altered, that they cannot be relied upon for truth; I have, therefore, thought it best to publish them separately, uncoloured, in the Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia.

As it is, the work will, with a few exceptions, embrace descriptions of such Reptiles only as inhabit the United States, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Rocky Mountains, and from Canada to the confines of Texas.

Whatever merit the work may possess, must be determined by Naturalists; my own wishes will be gratified, if I have either restored or given order to NORTH AMERICAN HERPETOLOGY.

JOHN EDWARDS HOLBROOK.

Medical College, Charleston, South Carolina, 1842.



Holbrook, John Edwards. 1842. "Preface [North American Herpetology: A description of the reptiles inhabiting the United States, by John Edwards Holbrook]." *North American herpetology; or, A description of the reptiles inhabiting the United States* 1, ix–xv. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.326743>.

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