

TYPE SPECIMENS OF  
REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS  
IN THE AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM

H. G. COGGER

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## INTRODUCTION

The following catalogue lists, for the first time, the primary and supplementary type specimens of amphibians and reptiles in The Australian Museum. It seems desirable to record, from time to time in a museum's history, the status of type collections on which a great deal of taxonomic research is ultimately based.

The past century has seen many changes in taxonomic and curatorial approaches to type material, and many recent studies have been hampered by the failure of some earlier workers to designate clearly, type specimens and/or their depository. Literature references to type material often fail to correspond with designated specimens or catalogued data in museums, and a museum curator is often faced with problems of correlating published descriptions with specimens or catalogues in his charge.

The Australian Museum, which was founded in 1827, is the oldest natural history museum in Australia. It moved to its present site in 1848 (the first building is now the north-west wing of the present building), but relatively little is known of the early history of its collections. Initially most specimens were acquired solely for display value as 'natural curiosities'; not until the 1860's was the nucleus of a research and reference collection established.

At the time of writing, these collections consist of approximately 75,000 specimens, almost all of which are from Australia and the south-west Pacific region. There are 969 primary and 2 supplementary type specimens (as defined by Mayr *et al.*, 1953, p. 239) in these collections, including the recently acquired type collection of the Macleay Museum in the University of Sydney.

## HISTORY OF THE HERPETOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS

Little is known of the herpetological collections prior to the time of Gerard Krefft, (1830-1881) who was Curator (=Director) of the Museum from 1860 until 1874. Probably the first published reference to these collections is that of Bennett (1834) who commented that "I visited the colonial museum, which is arranged for the present in a small room . . . . There are also several of the mammalia, and reptiles of the colony in the collection . . ." Bennett subsequently became Curator of the Museum, and although he had a limited interest in herpetology (Bennett, 1837; Copleson, 1955) he was not noticeably active in this field. Gerard Krefft, after his appointment in 1860, actively acquired reptiles for the Museum and wrote numerous papers on reptiles (Whitley, 1969). However, Krefft had a lengthy and bitter dispute with the Museum's Trustees (Whitley, 1969) which may well have affected the state of the herpetological collections. Also, much of the material acquired by Krefft was lodged in European museums. Nevertheless, the collections apparently flourished under Krefft's interest, for in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of May 13, 1864 (p.2), in a leading article on The Australian Museum, it was said that "The reptile case with its now almost dormant inmates, appears to be a great attraction to the visitors, numbers of whom