Records, 1873-1968

by Smithsonian Institution Archives
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Collection Overview

Repository: Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu

Creator: National Museum of Natural History, Division of Reptiles and Amphibians

Title: Records

Dates: 1873-1968

Quantity: 4.4 linear meters.

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation
Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 161, National Museum of Natural History, Division of Reptiles and Amphibians, Records

Historical Note

The collection of reptiles and amphibians under the care of the Smithsonian Institution had its origins in the collection of Spencer F. Baird which he presented to the Institution when he came to Washington to accept the position of Assistant Secretary in 1850. For the next three decades there was no curator officially in charge of the collection, and most of the early publications resulting from the collection were produced by Baird and Charles Frederic Girard (1822-1895), who from 1850-1860 was Baird's chief assistant.

In 1879 Henry Crecy Yarrow (1840-1929), an army surgeon who had served as naturalist on the explorations west of the 100th meridian led by Lt. George Wheeler, was appointed Honorary Curator of the Department of Herpetology, a position which he filled on a part-time basis until his resignation in 1889. During the early 1880's the Department was known variously as the Department of Herpetology, the Department of Reptiles, and the Department of Reptiles and Batrachians. But by about 1885 the latter title had become standard. In 1947 the name was changed to the Division of Reptiles and Amphibians.

In 1897 the National Museum was reorganized into three departments: Biology, Geology, and Anthropology, with Reptiles and Batrachians as a Division of the Department of Biology. In 1947 another administrative reorganization took place in the United States National Museum. As part of the reorganization the Department of Biology was split into Departments of Botany and Zoology with Reptiles and Batrachians (renamed Reptiles and Amphibians) becoming a Division of the Department of Zoology. In 1964 the Department of Zoology was divided into three departments: Vertebrate Zoology, Invertebrate Zoology, and Entomology, with Reptiles and Amphibians a Division of the Department of Vertebrate Zoology.

Leonhard Stejneger (1851-1943), the first full-time curator of the Division of Reptiles and Batrachians, came to the Smithsonian in 1881 as an ornithologist. During 1882 and 1883 he worked as an observer for the U. S. Signal Service in the Commander Islands, where he made large collections for the U. S.
National Museum. After his return to Washington he was made Assistant Curator in the Department of Birds (1884), a position which he held until asked to assume the position of Curator of the Department of Reptiles and Batrachians in 1889, after the resignation of Yarrow. He accepted the position and held it until his death in 1943.

Doris Mable Cochran (1898-1968) was appointed Aid in the Division in 1919. In 1927 she was named Assistant Curator; in 1942 she became Associate Curator; and in 1956 she was named Curator, a position which she held until her death.

Descriptive Entry

This collection consists of correspondence of the Division of Reptiles and Batrachians, a correspondence which was conducted by Yarrow, Stejneger, and Cochran.

The correspondence of James A. Peters (1922-1972), who came to the United States National Museum in 1964 and was appointed Curator in Charge of the Division of Reptiles and Amphibians in 1966, is maintained by the Division at this time.

The records contain general correspondence carried out by the Division's curators. Materials of Leonhard Stejneger pertaining to the international congresses he was invited to and attended as a representative of the USNM (1895-1911) are included. In addition, administrative memoranda regarding the USNM operations for the Division of Reptiles and Amphibians and the Departments of Biology, Vertebrate Zoology, and Zoology are included. This material pertains to requisitions, budgetary matters, publication policy, expeditions of curators, museum exhibitions, and personnel matters.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:
Herpetology

Names:
Baird, Spencer Fullerton, 1823-1887
Cochran, Doris M. (Doris Mabel), 1898-
Department of Biology (NMNH). Division of Reptiles and Batrachians (NMNH)
Department of Biology (NMNH). National Museum of Natural History
Department of Herpetology (NMNH). Department of Reptiles and Batrachians (NMNH)
Department of Reptiles (NMNH)
Department of Reptiles and Batrachians (NMNH)
Department of Reptiles and Batrachians (NMNH). Department of Herpetology (NMNH)
Department of Vertebrate Zoology (NMNH). National Museum of Natural History
Department of Zoology (NMNH). National Museum of Natural History
Division of Reptiles and Batrachians (NMNH)
Division of Reptiles and Batrachians (NMNH)
Division of Reptiles and Batrachians (NMNH). Department of Biology (NMNH)
Peters, James Arthur, 1922-
Stejneger, Leonhard, 1851-1943
Yarrow, H. C. (Harry Crecy), 1840-1929
Container Listing

Series 1: General Correspondence (Incoming and Outgoing), 1873-1968, arranged alphabetically.

This material consists of the correspondence of the three curators of the division, Henry Crecy Yarrow, Leonhard Stejneger, and Doris Mable Cochran. The loose correspondence (boxes 1-9) is arranged alphabetically by correspondent and chronologically there under, with the exception of incoming correspondence to Yarrow. This bound volume (1881-1884) is arranged in a rough chronological order. Some of Stejneger's correspondence predates his appointment as Curator in the Division in 1889. This correspondence concerns his work in the Department of Birds. Outgoing correspondence prior to about 1922 can be found in Series 2.

Box 1

Aarhus - Aus

Austin - Thomas Barbour, 1920

Thomas Barbour, 1921-1945

Box 2

Thomas Barbour - Letters Relating to Agassiz turtle drawings, 1936-1938 - Frank N. Blanchard

Keith Blanchard - Brockett

Brodie - Cary

Box 3

Case - Conant

Condit - Mary Cynthia Dickinson

S. D. Dickinson - Eigenmann

Box 4

Eiselt - Helen Thompson Gaige, 1937

Helen Thompson Gaige, 1938 - Coleman Jett Goin, 1960

Coleman Jett Goin, 1961 - Grote

Box 5

Groves - Hildebrand

Hill - Ives

Jackley - A. Kelly
Box 6

R. S. Kelly - Legler
Lehrs - Adolph Lutz
Bertha Lutz - Marinkelle

Box 7

Mark - Moore
Moreland - Ortenburger, undated & incomplete dates
Ortenburger, 1921 - Piper

Box 8

Plank - Rivero
Robb - Albert Schwartz
Frank Schwartz - Hugh Smith

Box 9

Malcolm Smith - Terentjev
Test - Walton
Wandolleck - Miscellaneous Correspondence

Box 10

Letters Received, Book B. Department of Reptiles, 1881-1884
Correspondence Log, June 24, 1899 - October 4, 1902

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Series 2: Outgoing Correspondence, 1882-1883, 1889-1922, arranged chronologically.

Consists of bound letterpress books. All volumes indexed individually.

Box 10
October 16, 1882-December 13, 1883 (Letters Answered, Book A. Department of Reptiles)
March 21, 1889 - September 8, 1891

Box 11
December 26, 1890 - May 15, 1900
September 7, 1891 - November 3, 1892
November 3, 1892 - April 23, 1894
April 23, 1894 - December 23, 1895

Box 12
January 19, 1896 - February 4, 1898
May 20, 1896 - February 9, 1904
February 4, 1898 - July 26, 1899
July 3, 1899 - August 20, 1900

Box 13
August 17, 1900 - January 7, 1902
January 7, 1902 - May 11, 1903
May 12, 1903 - February 6, 1905
February 6, 1905 - July 7, 1906

Box 14
July 9, 1906 - April 9, 1908
April 10, 1908 - April 4, 1910
April 9, 1910 - January 8, 1913

Box 15
January 14, 1913 - March 2, 1916
March 7, 1916 - February 2, 1922
Series 3: Correspondence Related to Scientific Congresses, 1895-1911, arranged chronologically.

Consists of material sent to Leonhard Stejneger regarding the various congresses he was invited to and attended as a representative of the United States National Museum. The correspondence (mostly incoming) relates to Stejneger's duties as the Organizing Secretary, Section of Zoogeography, Seventh International Zoological Congress (1907) and his participation on the International Committee on Zoological Nomenclature (1899-1909). The correspondence is arranged chronologically by congress and alphabetically thereunder by correspondent.


Box 16

- Third International Zoological Congress, 1895
- Seventh International Geological Congress, 1897
- Fourth International Zoological Congress, 1898
- International Committee on Zoological Nomenclature, 1899-1907 (3 folders)
- Fifth International Zoological Congress, 1901 (3 folders)
- Sixth International Zoological Congress, 1904 (2 folders)
- Fourth International Ornithological Congress, 1905 (2 folders)
- Seventh International Zoological Congress, 1907 (3 folders)
- Fourth International Fishery Congress, 1908
- Fifth International Ornithological Congress, 1909
- Eighth International Zoological Congress, 1910
- Tenth International Geographical Congress, 1911

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This material relates to the operation of the United States National Museum, particularly the Department of Biology, Department of Zoology, and the Department of Vertebrate Zoology as well as the Division of Reptiles and Amphibians. Includes requisitions, budgets, publication matters and policies, expeditions by curators, exhibitions, personnel changes, and other routine matters within the Smithsonian Institution and the U. S. National Museum.

Box 16

Correspondents in this series include: Herbert Friedmann, Arthur Remington Kellogg, Waldo LaSalle Schmitt.

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