Chelonian type specimens at the Oxford University Museum

MAŁGOSIA NOWAK-KEMP1 & UWE FRITZ2,3

1 Oxford University Museum of Natural History, Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PW, United Kingdom
2 Museum of Zoology, Senckenberg Dresden, A. B. Meyer Building, D-01109 Dresden, Germany
3 Corresponding author. E-mail: uwe.fritz@senckenberg.de

Abstract

In the present paper, the history of the chelonian collection of the Oxford University Museum is summarized and extant type specimens are identified. Currently, there are 46 name-bearing types of 25 chelonian taxa and paralectotypes of three taxa described by Georg Baur, Thomas Bell, André Marie Constant Duméril & Gabriel Bibron, and John Edward Gray from the families Emydidae, Geoemydidae, Testudinidae, Chelidae, and Pelomedusidae. Among the name-bearing types, there are holotypes of eight taxa (Cyclemys bellii Gray, 1863; Emys speciosa var. levigata Gray, 1831; Phrynops bellii Gray, 1844; Rhinoclemys bellii Gray, 1863; Sternothaerus leachianus Bell, 1825; Sternothaerus trifasciatus Bell, 1825; Testudo hercules var. truncata Gray, 1831; Testudo tentoria Bell, 1828) and one lectotype is of Pyxis arachnoides Bell, 1827. Two additional holotypes or syntypes are of Terrapene maculata Bell, 1825 and Terrapene nebulosa Bell, 1825, and 35 syntypes represent 14 taxa (Cyclemys orbiculata Bell, 1834; Emys concentrica var. polita Gray, 1831; Emys crassicollis Gray, 1831; Emys decussata Gray, 1831; Emys hamiltonii Gray, 1831; Emys irrigata Duméril & Bibron, 1835; Emys speciosa Gray, 1831; Emys spinosa Gray, 1831; Emys tectum Gray, 1830; Emys thurjii Gray, 1831; Kinixys castanea Bell, 1827; Kinixys homeana Bell, 1827; Testudo actinodes Bell, 1828; Testudo guntheri Baur, 1889). Three paralectotypes are of Emys dentata Gray, 1831, eight paralectotypes are of Emys vulgaris Gray, 1831, and one paralectotype is of Pyxis arachnoides Bell, 1827. Except the syntype of Testudo guntheri Baur, 1889, originating from the college of Christ Church, Oxford, all type specimens belong to the former collection of Thomas Bell that was transferred to Oxford in 1862. Testudo guntheri Baur, 1889 is regarded as nomen dubium because it was based on specimens without locality data.

Key words: Chelonians, herpetology, Thomas Bell, type specimens

Introduction

The Oxford University Museum houses a type-rich chelonian collection. Nearly all of the type specimens are part of the former private collection of one of the most influential 19th Century scholars working on the diversity of cheloniens, Thomas Bell (1792–1880). Besides type specimens of species described by Bell, this collection was mainly used by John Edward Gray (1800–1875) as source for the description of several new chelonian species, in part based on manuscript names of Bell (Gray 1830–1835, 1831a, b, 1844, 1863a, b). Also Duméril & Bibron (1835) described a terrapin species, Emys irrigata, based on a manuscript name by Bell, of which the original specimens were in his collection. The major part of Bell’s collection arrived in the Oxford University Museum in 1862 as a present by Reverend F. W. Hope who had earlier purchased the collection from Bell. In the following, we review the history of this historically important collection and give an account of the identified type specimens present in Oxford. Besides Bell’s specimens, the Oxford University Museums also received chelonian specimens from other collectors and donors as well as from the Ashmolean Museum and the Anatomical Museum of Christ Church, Oxford. Amongst the Christ Church specimens, there is a shell with an articulated skeleton of a Galapagos tortoise that served as syntype of Testudo guntheri Baur, 1889. It constitutes the only chelonian type in Oxford that originates not from the Bell Collection. Interestingly, Günther (1877: p. 63) claims that this specimen was “purchased of a dealer in Paris.