

NORTH CAROLINA REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS OF HISTORICAL NOTE IN THE COLLECTION OF THE ZOOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA

AARON M. BAUER

*Department of Biology, Villanova University
Villanova, PA 19085-1699*

INDRANEIL DAS

*Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation,
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Sarawak, Malaysia*

Abstract: The collection of the Zoological Survey of India in Calcutta contains several North American reptile and amphibian specimens of historical note. Three type specimens of snakes, two of which are still extant, currently regarded as junior synonyms of *Farancia abacura*, *F. erythrogramma*, and *Virginia striatula*, are among these specimens. The bulk of the mid-19th Century American herpetological material in Calcutta was obtained through a donation of a collection from the North Carolina Coastal Plain, probably from the vicinity of Jackson, Northampton County, to the Asiatic Society of Bengal in the mid-1850s.

Key words: Reptilia; Serpentes; North Carolina; Zoological Survey of India.

INTRODUCTION

The collection of the Zoological Survey of India (formerly the Indian Museum, and earlier, the Asiatic Society of Bengal) is large and historically significant and contains the type material associated with a large number of amphibian and reptile species. Among the noteworthy portions of the collection are specimens amassed by and/or reported on by workers such as Theodore Cantor (1809-1860), Edward Blyth (1810-1873), Thomas Jerdon (1811-1872), John Anderson (1833-1900), William Blanford (1832-1905), William Theobald (1829-1908), Ferdinand Stoliczka (1838-1874), William Sclater (1863-1944), and Thomas Nelson Annandale (1876-1924). The last herpetologist to make a comprehensive examination of the collection was Malcolm Smith, who reviewed much of the Indian Museum reptile material in preparing his volumes in the *Fauna of British India* series (1931, 1935, 1943). Unfortunately, Smith provided few explicit details about the status of the Asian types he borrowed and did not investigate the types of extralimital species. As a result, the condition of many of the 19th Century specimens in the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) had, until the present, remained unknown—a situation exacerbated by the loan policies and curatorial inadequacies of the institution. Reptile types, however, have recently been reviewed by Das et al. (1998), who located many specimens previous thought or assumed to have been lost.

Although the bulk of the Zoological Survey of India herpetological collections, and its types, are based on material from India and adjacent Asian countries,