

A resource for chelonian research

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In 2018 I donated more than 450 skulls, skeletons, skins and other relics to Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, which researches many aspects of wildlife conservation, including welfare and trade, integration of wildlife into cities and captive breeding. It also teaches a privately funded post-graduate Diploma in International Wildlife Conservation Practice for international students. The Collection is a by-product of fifty years of research in comparative anatomy and physiology. Animals are beautiful and interesting, so after examining the soft tissues for research into natural obesity I kept many of the skulls and skeletons, cleaning and preparing them at home as a hobby. All are now housed in a dedicated outbuilding at WildCRU's headquarters in Tubney, ten miles west of Oxford. The building belongs to Oxford University and is not open to the public, but can be visited by prior arrangement.

The Collection consists mostly of mammals and birds but includes about a hundred chelonians of more than thirty different species, marine, freshwater and terrestrial, derived from specimens previously used as food, materials, pets and research (Fig. 1). There are many complete skeletons, some mounted with all major bones labelled, others loose bones or fragmentary relics and a few are intact mummified bodies. Eggs, juveniles and elderly animals are included, some with healed injuries and deformations arising from disease, parasites or prolonged mineral deficiencies and other forms of malnutrition. All items are labelled, numbered, photographed and catalogued with scientific and common names, specimen details and, where possible, provenance.

The donation is intended primarily for scientific teaching and as a resource for any approved biological or medical research, including those involving destructive methods, but anyone, amateur or professional, may apply for permission to examine, draw, photograph or laser scan any item. The data may be used to print replicas or for any form of photographic manipulation, thus preserving the original specimens while disseminating knowledge of their diverse, intricate structures. Specimens may be borrowed briefly for approved purposes by special arrangement, but not removed for incorporation into collages or other permanent art works.



Fig. 1. Clockwise from bottom left: softshell river turtle *Pelodiscus* (= *Trionyx*) neck vertebrae; same species skull, jaws & beak *in situ*; western box turtle *Terrapene ornata* ♂ aged at least 40y; Russian tortoise *Testudo* (= *Agrionemys*) *horsfieldii* ribs, dermal bone and scutes in growing carapace; elongate tortoise *Indotestudo* (= *Geochelone*) *elongata* young adult ♂; red-eared slider terrapin *Trachemys* (= *Pseudemys*, *Chrysemys*) *scripta elegans* mature ♀ deformed shell, died after years of lethargy, probably due to prolonged iodine deficiency.

A popular account of the research from which this Collection is derived is Pond (1998). The Catalogue, terms of use for the Collection and how to apply for access are found at: <https://www.wildcru.org/the-pond-collection/>

Reference

Pond, C. M. (1998). *The Fats of Life*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.