

LACEPÈDE, B.-G.-É. (1756-1825).

Bernard-Germain-Étienne de la Ville-sur-Ilon, Comte (or count) de Lacepède (sometimes spelled Lacépède or de la Cépède; see *Note*), was a leading politician of Revolutionary France, a naturalist and successor to Buffon, as well as an accomplished musician. Lacepède was born to a noble family, on 26 December 1756, at Agen in southwest France. He was a recluse by instinct and his early life was devoted to philosophy and music, but at the age of 21 he went to Paris and soon formed a friendship with Georges Buffon, who sparked his interest in natural history. Buffon enlisted Lacepède's aid in his grand project to summarize all of natural history and, when he died in 1788, Lacepède, together with L.-J.-M. Daubenton, had been Buffon's choice to succeed him.

Among other duties, Lacepède became keeper of the natural history collections in the king's garden, the Jardin du Roy, but after the revolution, the first Constituent Assembly, in June 1793, transformed these collections into the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle and, at the same time, created 12 chairs, or professorships with tenure. Lacepède was absent from Paris during this period; because of his nobility and previous political activity, during the year-long Reign of Terror he briefly retired to the countryside near Leuville.

In the following year, however, the chair of vertebrates, then held by Étienne Geoffroy St. Hilaire, was divided, and that covering fishes and reptiles was offered to the count. Lacepède conducted some research during this period, but he became increasingly active politically, first as a Senator (1799), then as President of the Senate (1801), and later



By: A. C. de Lacepède

when appointed by Napoleon to be Grand Chancellor of the Legion of Honor (1803). He felt obliged to resign his professorship in 1803, and although Constant Duméril assumed the duties of that chair in 1803, he did not formally take the full title until Lacepède's death, which occurred during the night of 5-6 October 1825, at Épinay-sur-Seine, now a Paris suburb.

Lacepède published many important works on vertebrates, especially on fishes and cetaceans. Besides some shorter papers, his major herpetological *opus* was the "Histoire Naturelle des Quadrupèdes Ovipares et des Serpens," issued in both quarto (2 volumes, 1788-1789) and octavo (4 volumes, 1788-1790) editions as part of the Buffon series. This was the first comprehensive world summary of amphibians and reptiles and while it contains still-useful historical information, the illustrations are poor. And, while it far exceeded the earlier attempt of J. N. Laurenti (1768), it showed no advance in the natural arrangement of genera. The nomenclature is inconsistently binomial, and in 1987 the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature declared that Lacepède's section on snakes (only!) is unavailable for nomenclatural purposes, except for a few conserved names.

Nevertheless, Lacepède's book was very influential, being superseded in importance only by the "Erpétologie Générale" of Constant Duméril and Gabriel Bibron half a century later. Consequently, Lacepède's work went through many printings and resettings—even as late as 1878—and two translations: a German edition by J. M. Bechstein (5 volumes, 1800-1802) and one in English by Robert Kerr (4 volumes, 1802; reprinted 1978).

• *References*: "Sketch of the Life and Character of the late Count de Lacépède," by W. Swainson, *Zool. Jour.*, 3: 73-76, 1827; "La Vie et l'Oeuvre de Lacépède," by L. Roule, *Mém. Soc. Zool. France*, 27: 1-99, 1918; "Cent-cinquantième de la Chaire d'Ichthyologie et d'Herpétologie," by L. Bertin, *Bull. Mus. Hist. Nat.*, 17: 353-372, 1945; "Bernard-Germain-Étienne de la Ville-sur-Ilon, Comte de Lacépède," by T. A. Appel, *Dict. Sci. Biogr.*, 7: 546-548, 1973; "Lacepède (1756-1825), l'Homme et Son Oeuvre Herpétologique," by J. L. Fischer, *Bull. Soc. Zool. France*, 27: 479-485 (= *Bull. Soc. Herpétol. France*, 7: 479-485), 1977. • *Portrait*: From Roule, 1918. • *Signature* (1825): Adler collection. • *Note*: Fischer (1977, p. 484) argued that the correct spelling is "Lacepède," without the acute accent on the first *e*. Both of the forms "Lacépède" and "Lacepède" are found in the count's own publications. However, I have seen several specimens of his signature from the period 1808-1825, and all have the form "Lacepède," which for that reason has been preferred in this biography.

SCHOEPFF, Johann David (1752-1800).

Schoepff (see *Note*), known to herpetologists for his elaborate atlas of turtles, was a German botanist, zoologist, and physician famous for his early exploration of North America. He was born on 8 March 1752 in Wunsiedel and attended the University of Erlangen (1770-1776) where his professors included the naturalists P. L. Stadius Müller and