



B. Merrem *Blasius Merrem*

Merrem is better known as an ornithologist, not only for his several important books but for his discovery of the air-sac respiratory system of birds. His most elaborate herpetological book is little known today because it was published mostly at Merrem's own expense and thus in such a small edition that it is now very rare. His "Beitraege zur Geschichte der Amphibien" (only three parts appeared, in 1790, 1790 [second edition 1829], and 1821) included detailed descriptions of reptiles, with complete synonymies and numerous good, handcolored illustrations, many drawn by Merrem himself; the geographic coverage is worldwide, although in these three parts mostly snakes are described, but it is a more competent work than that of Count de Lacepède or Merrem's other contemporaries.

What a pity it was for the development of herpetology that Merrem's magnificent series had to be terminated. He also published some shorter papers, but it was his "Versuch eines Systems der Amphibien" (1820, alternate title "Tentamen Systematis Amphibiorum"), written in parallel German and Latin texts, that is best known today. In it he covered all known species, but in far more abbreviated form than in his "Beitraege"; he also separated reptiles from amphibians, although the credit for recognizing amphibians as a class apart from reptiles is generally accorded to P.-A. Latreille (1825).

• *References*: "Memoriam . . . Blasii Merremii," by C. F. C. Wagner, Acad. Bayrhofer, Marburg, 36 pages, 1824; "Blasius Merrem," p. 438-439. In F. Gundlach, *Catalogus Professorum Academiae Marburgensis*. G. Braun, Marburg, 1927; "Blasius Merrem," p. 278-279. In G. von Roden, *Die Universität Duisburg*, W. Braun, Duisburg, 1968; Stresemann, 1975 (pp. 60-63). • *Portrait*: Courtesy Stadtarchiv Duisburg. • *Signature* (two forms): Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen, courtesy Mr. Grobe, and Museum für Naturkunde der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, courtesy Rainer Günther.

RUSSELL, Patrick (1726-1805).

A physician by profession, Russell was the first to study Indian snakes systematically. He was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, 6 February 1726, where he attended the university. He joined his older half-brother, Alexander Russell, in Aleppo, Syria, in 1750; he eventually succeeded him as physician to an English factory there and returned to England in 1772. In 1782 he accompanied his younger brother, Claud Russell, an officer in the East India Company, to Vizagapatam (now Visakhapatnam), on the Coromandel coast of India north of Madras. Three years later he was appointed naturalist to the company, and he largely gave up his medical practice to study the local botany, fishes, and snakes. In 1787, he issued a practical guide for distinguishing the poisonous snakes of India, which was published by the Madras Government and widely distributed throughout India. He returned to England in January 1789 and spent the remainder of his life writing books. He died in London on 2 July 1805 with many of the snakes undescribed and the book unfinished.

Russell's book "An Account of Indian Serpents" (1796) and its sequel "A Continuation of an Account of Indian Serpents" (1801-1802, but finished 1807-[1810] from his notes) are one of the great classics of herpetology and may well be the most physically imposing books ever written exclusively on a herpetological topic (they are 55 cm high and weigh 8 kg). The magnificent handcolored plates are equally remarkable and depict the snakes lifesize if rather flat. There is a total of 92 plates displayed on 87 leaves,



Patrick Russell