

Georges Cuvier. Cuvier was precocious and displayed his enormous memory even as a boy. His father, a former French army officer, intended him to be a Lutheran minister, but fortunately for science the duke of Württemberg was seeking gifted students for his new Caroline University in Stuttgart, where Cuvier began in 1784 at the age of 15. He specialized in administrative law and economics but much preferred K. F. Kielmeyer's lectures on anatomy. At graduation (1788) he could find no suitable employment so he accepted a position in Normandy as a private tutor. Being near the sea and with much free time, his interest in natural history blossomed, especially in fishes and anatomy.



In 1795, the main events of the French Revolution over, Cuvier wrote to B.-G.-É. Lacepède and Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, professors at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, and sent selections of his unpublished works, whereupon the latter invited him to Paris as his collaborator. Cuvier's brilliance as a researcher and teacher was immediately recognized. He shortly became a professor at the museum, at the age of 25, a member of the Institut de France in 1796, and in 1800 he succeeded L.-J.-M. Daubenton as a professor at the Collège de France. Thereafter he held numerous important government posts in addition to his academic ones, becoming in 1811 a chevalier,

in 1819 a baron, and finally, in 1831, a peer of France, titles which were in keeping with his well-known vanity. He was said to have been pliant to superiors while authoritarian to others, and to have showed favoritism to those who flattered him and to friends and relatives, including his younger brother, Frédéric Cuvier, for whom he arranged a position as mammalogist at the museum. He died in Paris on 13 May 1832.

Cuvier was responsible for building the great collections of the museum, then the largest research organization in the world. He published three major works on general zoology: "Tableau Élémentaire" (1797), "Leçons d'Anatomie Comparée" (1800, 1805), in collaboration with A.-M.-C. Duméril and G.-L. Duvernoy, and his classic "Le Règne Animal," a summary of all animals (first edition in four volumes, 1817 [1816], reprinted 1969; second edition, in five volumes, 1829-1830, in collaboration with P.-A. Latreille). In the "Règne" he described many new species of amphibians and reptiles, but gave most of them vernacular, rather than Latin names, and thus authorship was claimed by later writers. Together with Achille Valenciennes, he wrote the 22-volume "Histoire Naturelle des Poissons" (1828-1849, reprinted 1969), the basis for modern ichthyology.

In addition to these works, Cuvier collaborated with Alexandre Brongniart in studies of the fossiliferous beds of the Paris environs, thus becoming leader of the field of paleontology. He also found himself in increasing disagreement with museum colleagues on the question of immutability of species, which Cuvier, perhaps partly driven by his religious beliefs, considered unchanging. He thus attributed the different forms in geological strata to destruction by catastrophic events. Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and J.-B. Lamarck, on the other hand, believed in gradual transformation, based in part on studies of crocodylians and turtles. Geoffroy had been part of Napoléon's ill-fated Egyptian expedition (1798-1799) which, among other spoils, brought back the mummified remains of 3000-year-old crocodiles, turtles, and other organisms, and beginning in 1802 these were examined for evidence of rate of transformation. Thus began a long series of papers by both Geoffroy and Cuvier on crocodylians and turtles—fossils, mummies, and living forms—to provide evidence for their conflicting views. Coincidentally, the new taxa *Crocodylus acutus*, *C. cataphractus*, *C. rhombifer*, *Paleosuchus palpebrosus*, *Trionyx gangeticus*, and *T. subplanus* and the genera *Alligator* and *Trionyx* were named by them. After Charles Darwin, Cuvier's glory inevitably diminished.

Cuvier's herpetological work was only incidental to broader projects, yet he made important contributions. One of the earliest arose from his idea of the correspondence of body parts and his belief that none could change without altering the others. To him this meant that each part alone showed the nature of the others and led to his famous reconstructions of fossils. In 1726 J. J. Scheuchzer, who like many at that time believed in the literality of the Bible, published the description of a meter-long fossil salamander, but not knowing of any giant salamanders (*Andrias*