

BRITISH REPTILES AND BATRACHIANS

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British Reptiles and Batrachians by Catherine C. Hopley

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CATHERINE C. HOPLEY

**BRITISH REPTILES
AND BATRACHIANS**

The Young Collector Series.]

BRITISH REPTILES

AND

BATRACHIANS.

BY

CATHERINE C. HOPLEY,

Author of "Curiosities and Wonders of Serpent Life,"

"Aunt Jenny's American Pets," etc., etc.



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INTRODUCTION.

THIS little book differs in several notable particulars from most of those of the "Young Collector" series that have already appeared. First, the creatures herein described are living pets, the occupants of the Vivarium and not the Cabinet. Next they are few; the intention of these volumes being to treat of British species only, and Britain has but few reptiles. Thirdly, though still comparatively small creatures, they belong to the important group of *Vertebrata* or back-boned animals.

Those of our young collectors who have already possessed themselves of Kirby's, Butler's, Woodward's, and Skuse's contributions to this series, will have observed that the Insects, Shellfish, and Crustaceans treated of are boneless; and that, compared with the rest of the animal kingdom, all are very small creatures. It is worthy of note that out of the seven sub-kingdoms in which zoologists have generally arranged the inhabitants of the globe, six are composed entirely of these small, boneless creatures, while the one remaining sub-kingdom, animals with a bony skeleton, the *Vertebrata*, embraces the largest and the most important groups, including man. Persons who have acquired the habit of observing nature—those particularly who incline to the study of animated nature—cannot fail to be impressed by its teeming life in myriad forms. Even in a city during the summer, birds and insects are abundant; and we have only to place some pond weed in a glass bowl of water, and a world of life will soon inhabit it. Should our home be in rural districts, and our inclination lead us to study the denizens of trees, streams, or meadows, we become fairly puzzled as to which class of beings to choose and where to begin. Within a square foot of soil on the bank where we rest we may, with an ordinary magnifier, see more living

creatures than we can count. Let us stoop over a brook or a rain-pool on a warm, sunny day, and again we shall find it impossible to calculate the number and variety of minute objects that in diverse movements are flitting, darting, swimming, in an independent existence. The more powerful our magnifying glass the more bewildering are the wondrous forms of microscopic creatures revealed to us. At the seaside, on the surface of the waves, and in the depths of the ocean, living forms are not less numerous. By this we can understand how it is that while our great naturalists have arranged all known animals under—say seven grand divisions, six out of the seven embrace only small, boneless, and, to a great extent, microscopic beings.

Included among the largest of these boneless creatures are our familiar acquaintances of the garden, and the shore,—worms, slugs, spiders, beetles, butterflies,—all insects, in fact—snails, centipedes, crabs, lobsters, star-fishes, jelly-fishes, sea anemones, and many others that will occur to the memory as being boneless and bloodless. By “bloodless,” not having red blood is to be understood; and as it happens that all animals with a bony frame possess red blood, Aristotle divided the animal kingdom into two great groups, “those with blood and those without blood.”

But the fluid circulating through the bodies of insects, worms, shell-fish, etc., though nearly colourless, answers to the blood of quadrupeds, and is so spoken of by physiologists; therefore we may dismiss any reference to the fluids of the body, and retain the distinction of bones and no bones—correctly speaking, *Vertebrate* and *Invertebrate* animals—as the most explicit and comprehensive mode of separating the two great groups. All animals with a bony skeleton, whether seal, fish, frog, or elephant, being formed on a similar plan, of which the solid structure, the backbone, is the chief support; and this backbone being composed of a number of small bones—*vertebræ* (see skeletons, pp. 26, 82)—compactly jointed together, the term *Vertebrate* has been chosen to designate them. Excepting serpents and some of their allies vertebrate animals have four limbs, but never more than four. In the seal these four limbs are paddles; in the fish they are its two pairs of principal fins, the pectoral and ventral fins; in the bird the two fore limbs become wings; in ourselves arms; in the frog and the elephant they are four legs. We are apt to speak of four-footed animals as “quadrupeds,” in distinction to bipeds, but while frogs, newts, and lizards have each four legs we do not associate them with quadrupeds; though Aristotle did call them “Oviparous, or egg-laying quadrupeds.” The great Cuvier divided the egg-producing animals into birds, insects, and reptiles; the latter including

serpents, lizards, turtles, crocodiles, and frogs; and, like Aristotle, he called the four latter "oviparous quadrupeds." Linnæus called all reptiles "Amphibious animals," but the study of the frog family, and the fact that they begin life like a fish, breathing through gills, has caused them to be separated from the class *Reptilia* and formed into a distinct class, the *Batrachia*, from *βατραχος*, a frog. They include a great many species in different parts of the world, while those at home are confined to frogs, toads, and their relatives the newts. *Batrachians* are true *Amphibians*, living alternately both in water and on land.

It is quite worth the attention of students to compare the progressive systems of some of our best-known naturalists. A general comprehension of the animal kingdom may be thus obtained; and a knowledge of the terms most frequently employed will be of use in whichever branch he desires to study.

Aristotle divided living beings into eight groups; viz.—

THOSE WITH BLOOD.

1. Viviparous four-footed animals; 2. Birds; 3. Oviparous four-footed animals; 4. Fishes.

THOSE WITHOUT BLOOD.

5. Soft animals (Cephalopods, etc.); 6. Soft animals with shells (Mollusca); 7. Insects; 8. Shelled animals (echini, snails, and mussels, etc.).

For a long while, in classifying "reptiles" and insects much confusion prevailed. The latter were "serpentes" because they creep; while the former were sometimes called "insects," because they lay eggs. It is not uncommon even now for the uneducated to speak of small reptiles as "insects."

Regarding classification Cuvier wrote—"It will be found that there exist four principal forms, four general plans on which all animals seem to have been modelled;" viz.—

1. *Animalia vertebrata*; 2. *Animalia mollusca*; 3. *Animalia articulata*; 4. *Animalia radiata*.

The last named is designated by Owen "a chaotic group," and by Huxley a "radiate mob;" but even now, as the microscope reveals fresh organisms and unsuspected relationships, zoologists differ in the arrangement of these sub-kingdoms. It must not be thought, therefore, that in criticising the classifications of those great men who may be termed the Fathers of Zoology, any slur is cast upon their work. In the labour of their lives they achieved results which have been starting-points for their successors.