

History of the Marshall University Herpetology Lab and West Virginia Biological Survey (museum)

Herpetological studies in West Virginia began with Dr. A. M. Reese, a vertebrate zoologist, who in 1907 became head of the zoology department at West Virginia University, a position which he held until his retirement in 1946. In the early 1930s, he asked a number of his graduate students to conduct herpetological surveys of their county of residence as their masters' theses. This was one of the pieces of what has developed into the largest collection of West Virginia amphibians and reptiles in the world. One of those graduate students was Dr. N.B Green, the first curator of the collection at Marshall University.

Mr. M. Graham Netting was important in the development of the current West Virginia herpetological collection. In 1925, he joined the staff of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh as its first full-time herpetologist. In addition to his many duties with the program at the Carnegie Museum and throughout Pennsylvania, he turned his attention to West Virginia where he established relationships with some of the outdoor organizations in the area. One of these organizations was the Oglebay Institute in Wheeling, West Virginia, which sponsored such activities as the Brooks Bird Club and the Oglebay Plant Club. The Brooks Bird Club held summer sessions at Lake Terra Alta in Preston County, offering programs in bird study, ecology, and plant study. Through the encouragement and help of Mr. Netting, the Brooks Bird Club began to include amphibians and reptiles in their studies. Today, the Brooks Bird Club holds annual forays at different locations throughout the state where they record the occurrences of flora and fauna including amphibians and reptiles.

Mr. Netting also became active in the West Virginia Academy of Science and through that group was able to channel many young investigators into productive field work. His interest in West Virginia herpetology never lagged, he remained alert to every new range extension, each new addition to the checklist, and he frequently encouraged aspiring authors to submit their observations for publication. He also contributed articles to the magazine West Virginia Wildlife, thereby fostering a broad interest throughout the state which led to publication of many papers and expanded the knowledge of herpetology within West Virginia.

During the summer of 1931, Dr. Albert H. Wright of Cornell University taught a field zoology course for West Virginia University which involved traveling over the state collecting and studying the vertebrate fauna including amphibians and reptiles.

In 1935, the West Virginia Academy of Science appropriated \$100 to pay the expenses for Mr. Neil D. Richmond to travel with the West Virginia Biology Field Course throughout the state collecting specimens. Mr. Richmond, a native of Fairmont whose interest was herpetology, had studied at the University of Michigan, and he subsequently became curator of herpetology at Carnegie Museum. The specimens he collected in 1935, supplemented during the summers of 1937 and 1938, formed the nucleus for the West Virginia Biological Survey Collections, stored in the science hall at West Virginia

University. Because Mr. Richmond was not a member of the university staff, there were no curatorial services available. No one on the faculty had an interest in herpetology, and the West Virginia Academy of Science was reluctant to invest any more money in the project. In order to protect the collections from threatened deterioration, they were moved in 1939 to Marshall College, where Dr. N. Bayard Green assumed their care. Between 1939 and 1971 the collections grew from approximately one thousand specimens to over five thousand. When Dr. Green retired in 1971, the collections came under the curatorship of Dr. Michael Seidel. In 1987, Dr. Thomas Pauley came to Marshall University and assumed the curatorial duties of the collection. Many of Dr. Pauley's students were funded by state and federal agencies, such as the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, US National Park Service, the US Department of Agriculture-Forest Service, and the US EPA, to study amphibians and reptiles throughout West Virginia. These studies allowed for additional specimens to be added to the collection. In addition to these funded studies, Dr. Pauley and his students searched for amphibians and reptiles throughout the state in search of new locations for species of concern. Dr. Pauley retired from teaching in 2013 but continues to study amphibians and reptiles throughout the state and work with the collection at Marshall. After Dr. Pauley's retirement, Marshall University hired Dr. Jayme Waldron to continue the herpetology tradition at the school. She received her Master of Science in Biological Sciences under the mentorship of Dr. Pauley in the Marshall University Herpetology Laboratory, and thus has a unique perspective and adds intellectual and scientific continuity to the museum and lab. Dr. Waldron's goals are to continue to use the museum's holdings for student research with particular emphasis on using museum records to document changes in species distributions and abundances.

Most material above is from "Amphibians and Reptiles in West Virginia" by N.B Green and T.K. Pauley. 1987. University of Pittsburgh Press.