

Do You Know Ditmars?

By Russ Case

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American Herpetologist Raymond Ditmars. Knowing that reptile newbies are entering the hobby every day, I thought I'd take a short blog to alert them to a classic figure in the world of herpetology that they may or may not have heard of (there are others, of course, and perhaps I'll touch on them in future blogs). This guy was one of the early pioneers, a trailblazer without whom the hobby might be very different today.

Meet Raymond Ditmars. Ditmars (1876-1942), interested in zoology as a child, eventually rose to prominence as a curator at the Bronx Zoo, where he first hired on as an assistant conservationist in charge of reptiles in 1899. He was interested in all animals, and later he became the curator of mammals at the zoo, as well as insects. But reptiles held a special place in his heart, and he wrote a number of classic works, including *The Reptile Book* (1907), *Reptiles of the World* (1910), *Snakes of the World* (1931) and *Reptiles of North America* (1936). These books did a lot to stoke the public's interest in our cold-blooded friends. Next time you're at a reptile expo, look for the book dealers such as Larry Kenton with Maryland Reptile Farm and Eric Thiss with *A Serpent's Tale*. Both have large selections of herpetology books for sale, and they might have or can get some original edition Ditmars books for you. Of course you might also find them at your local used book stores...treasures waiting to be discovered...or online.

Ditmars also produced nature films in the early days of motion pictures. Some of the many titles he produced include *Life of the Frog* (1915), *Insect Celebrities* (1915), *Transporting Wild Animals* (1917) and *Turtles of All Lands* (1918). I have never seen any of these films. It would be cool to check them out.

The books of Raymond Ditmars are great reading, and a terrific peek into the early days of reptile discovery. Find some and buy them!

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