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Title: Erecting a Database of Known UK Sphenodon (Tuatara) Material

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Call For Information

Erecting a database of known UK *Sphenodon* (Tuatara) material - Marc Jones, UCL

I am currently doing a PhD with Professor Susan E. Evans at University College London on the skull of the Tuatara (*Sphenodon*). This genus is the only living representative of the Rhynchocephalia, a group of lizard-like animals that were widespread and diverse during the time of the dinosaurs (Sues and Reisz 1995; Evans *et al.*, 2001; Apesteguía and Novas, 2003.). *Sphenodon* is therefore of great importance and demonstrates a suite of morphological features not found in any other extant animals (www.digimorph.org/specimens/Sphenodon_punctatus/adult/).

Currently *Sphenodon* occurs naturally on only about 26 New Zealand offshore islands but during the late 19th Century and beyond many animals were collected and widely distributed among universities, museums and certain schools in Europe and North America (Schmidt, 1952). As result many old collections have one or two specimens. *Sphenodon* is now heavily protected (Newman, 1987; Daugherty *et al.*, 1990), therefore previously collected material is irreplaceable and of great scientific value (Arnold, 1991).

Unfortunately many specimens have become isolated. This reduces awareness of their existence to the scientific community and precludes assessment of intraspecific variation, sexual dimorphism or ontogeny. In the long term their isolation and anonymity increases the risk of them being lost completely.

I am already in contact with the Natural History Museum; University of Cambridge Museum of Zoology; The Grant Museum of Zoology, University College London; Birkbeck College, University of London, zoology collection; Kings College London, zoology collection; the Manchester Museum; the Hancock Museum of Newcastle; the Royal Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh and the Hunterian Museum of Zoology, Glasgow.

If you possess, or know the whereabouts, of any *Sphenodon* specimens (skulls, skeletons, soft tissue, eggs, embryos, skins etc.) and want to add them to the *Sphenodon* database please send their registration numbers and brief information on the nature of the material. If you would like a copy of the database once it is complete please contact me for further details.

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