Take a personal tour of Australia’s oldest natural history collection...

museum

Photographs by Robyn Stacey
Text by Ashley Hay

A sumptuous new book showcasing the collection of the Macleay Museum at the University of Sydney
Colonial Secretary Alexander Macleay arrived in Australia in 1826. A man with a most singular passion for nature collecting, he brought with him one of Europe’s finest - and largest - natural history collections.

Over the next seven decades the Macleay family accumulated an astonishingly diverse collection of specimens from Australia and beyond. Macleay’s nephew, William John Macleay, donated his family’s collection to the University of Sydney in the 1880s, and these specimens formed the basis for the Macleay Museum, which now represents one of Australia’s oldest natural history collections.

Today the Macleay Museum is home to more than half a million insect specimens and over twenty thousand Australian and exotic animal specimens, including marsupials, monkeys, bats, birds, crustaceans, molluscs and many more. Because of the fragility of the collection, only 2% of the Macleay collection is on public display at any given time.

Now, over 100 of these rarely-seen objects from the collection are given new life in this truly sumptuous new book. Each object is accompanied by collection notes from its curator.

The story of a family’s passion for nature, a privileged view inside a spectacular collection, and a work of art in its own right - this is the perfect gift for any lover of the natural world.

Robyn Stacey’s work is represented in the National Gallery of Australia and all state galleries, as well as in university and private collections in Australia and internationally. Ashley Hay is the author of The Secret and Gum: The Story of Eucalypts and Their Champions. She has also written for The Independent Monthly, The Monthly and The Bulletin. Their last collaboration was Herbarium (2004).

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