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**"Weird and Wonderful: The First Objects of the National Historical Collection"**

Robin, Libby

Robin, Libby. "Weird and Wonderful: The First Objects of the National Historical Collection." *reCollections* 1, no. 2 (September 2006).

[https://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol\\_1\\_no\\_2/papers/weird\\_and\\_wonderful](https://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol_1_no_2/papers/weird_and_wonderful).

Sir Colin MacKenzie started collecting Australian marsupials during the very early years of the twentieth century because he was afraid they were rapidly becoming extinct. His collection of 'wet specimens' preserved the marsupials' anatomical and physiological material for scientific study. The significance of this collection to the nation was recognised by legislation in 1924, which proposed that the collection should 'form the nucleus of an Institute of Zoology to be established later at Canberra'. MacKenzie's collecting was praised at the time as 'an act of practical patriotism the merit of which it would be hard to over-estimate'.

The story of how these zoological specimens became 'history', and among the first objects covered by the legislation for the National Historical Collection under the *National Museum of Australia Act 1980*, reveals as much about the changing nature of museums and national collections in the twentieth century as about the aspirations of the original, rather eccentric collector. (Excerpt from the article)

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### Further readings:

- Stubbs, Brett J. "From 'Useless Brutes' to National Treasures: A Century of Evolving Attitudes towards Native Fauna in New South Wales, 1860s to 1960s." *Environment and History* 7, no. 1 (Feb., 2001): 23–56.  
<https://doi.org/10.3197/096734001129342397>.
- Frost, Warwick. "European Farming, Australian Pests: Agricultural Settlement and Environmental Disruption in Australia, 1800–1920." *Environment and History* 4, no. 2, Australia special issue (June, 1998): 129–143.  
<https://doi.org/10.3197/096734098779555682>.

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- *reCollections* website  
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### Websites linked in this text:

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