

Birds from extra-European expeditions in the collections of the National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic

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The National Museum in Prague, Czech Republic, houses ca. 17,000 skins and mounts of extra-European birds, including those from North America (300), Central America (500), South America (13,000), Africa (900), Asia (2000), and Australasia (300). A list of 42 specimen sets obtained during expeditions or from natural history dealers is presented. Earliest specimens originated from Johann Natterer's expedition to Brazil (1817-1832), Jan Vilém Helfer's expedition to Burma (1838-1839), August Corda's expedition to Texas (1848-1849), and perhaps Wilhelm Rüppell's expedition to Ethiopia (1831-1834).

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INTRODUCTION

The National Museum (NMP), Praha (Prague), Czech Republic, was founded in 1818 as a Bohemian museum (Nebeský 1868a,b, Černý 1884, Štěpánek 1975). The NMP was interested mainly in local nature, which corresponded to geopolitical interests of Bohemian (later Czechoslovak and Czech) governments, which never included 'exotic' countries. Museum ornithologists shaped the NMP bird collection in a similar way, although they attempted to obtain for exhibition purposes a wide array of interesting/spectacular birds. Antonín Frič (1832-1913; also Fryč or Fritsch), the first full-time curator of zoological collections, started his scientific career as an ornithologist interested mainly in the European avifauna (e.g. Frič 1854-1871) but later focused on other vertebrate groups. Bird curators working in the NMP during 1951-2003 (Jan Hanzák, Jan Hora, František Pojer and Pavel Janda) were interested mainly in the Czech/European field of ornithology. I am thus the first NMP bird curator interested in worldwide 'museum ornithology'.

In spite of the general neglect of extra-European ornithology, the NMP assembled a significant number of bird specimens collected during various expeditions to different areas of the world. At present (2009), the NMP possesses an estimated 17,000 skins and mounts of extra-European birds.

In this paper I present data on sets of extra-European birds received from expeditions or obtained from local collectors or natural history dealers. All specimen numbers given below are estimates, because I

reidentified and entered into a database only some 95 % of specimens to date, and the historical identity of some specimens requires further study. The paper is divided into a chapter on the sources of specimens, a geographic overview and a chronological list of specimen sets. In the list, sets are consecutively numbered (in brackets, e.g. [33]), and these numbers are used as reference numbers throughout this paper. Included are all sets with 20 or more specimens, and a few smaller sets if they are of particular interest. Main sources of information on expeditions and birds collected during them were label data, museum catalogues (Frič 1854a,b), and unpublished catalogues written in 1836 and from 1866 until today. Biographical data were taken from Martínek & Martínek (1998), Beolens & Watkins (2003), Gebhardt (2006), Jobling (2009), author archives, and sources cited below.

Spelling of toponyms generally follows NGA (2009) where possible, but toponyms and names of authors originally written in Cyrillic script were transliterated into the Latin ones according to currently valid rules (see Pedersen 2009, Mlíkovský 2010a). Geographic references follow the current administrative division of the world. All dates are given in the Gregorian calendar (Mlíkovský 2010b).

Museum acronyms are as follows:

- KDMH = Muzeum Emila Holuba, Kulturní dům města Holice (Emil Holub Museum, Cultural Center of Holice), Holice, Czech Republic
MNHN = Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, France