

Chapter 19

CHEMNITZ: Museum of Natural History Chemnitz: Identity Through Tradition

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Abstract Museums are more than a warehouse or storage place; museums are places of communication and education. The knowledge evolves from comparative studies of historical and current exhibits. Although numbers of exhibits are relevant, it is the potential of each single object which helps understanding natural and cultural history. Highlights of our zoological collection are regional collections of Geometridae, Mollusca, and Avifauna as well as juvenile vertebrates. In the context of new technologies and citizen science, it is now time for transparent magazines and international cooperation to prepare the path for tomorrow's museums.

Keywords Citizen science • Ecological shift • Geometridae • Juvenile • Vertebrate

19.1 Introduction

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Chemnitz was an upcoming and growing industrial city. However, contradictory to its commercial relevance, science and culture were underrepresented in public life. Chemnitz had neither held a patriarchal university nor baronial collections or scientific libraries as intellectual centers. Under those circumstances, 16 engaged citizens founded the “Chemnitz Society of Natural Science” on the 17th October 1859. The association evolved from the initial internal reader circle of scientific papers to a society being more open to the public by inviting to talks, conferences, and excursions. They even published their own scientific journal. The register of members contained teachers, medical doctors, scientists, merchants, and businessmen (Barthel 2001). Soon the society thought about developing and preserving the growing natural history collection and bibliographical inventory. In 1868 they donated the collections to the city of Chemnitz with the obligation to make them available to the public. That was the beginning of the very first civic museum in Chemnitz (Rössler and Zierold 2014). Due to the work of volunteering curators and immense public engagement,

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Fig. 19.1 Interior of the zoological collection as part of the King Albert Museum, Chemnitz, about 1909 (with permission from: Museum für Naturkunde Chemnitz; photo: MfNC)

biological and geological collections were developed and completed (Zierold 2014). They illustrated both the local specific features and the exotic nature worldwide, such as kiwi, duck-billed platypus, giant turtle, whale vertebra, and also an Egyptian mummy (Fig. 19.1).

Today the zoological collection comprises about 250,000 single objects subdivided into the areas of Entomology, Malacology, other Invertebrates, and Vertebrates (Mieth et al. 2006).

19.2 Small but Powerful: Insights into the Specific of the Zoological Collection of the Natural History Museum Chemnitz

The *entomological collection* distinguishes itself through comprehensive objects of Western Saxony and Eastern Thuringia butterflies and local beetles (Fig. 19.2). The collections highlight the ecological shift of the entomofauna due to growing urbanization in the area of Western Saxony. This allows scientific questions in the field of taxonomy and evolutionary ecology. Providing digital data of the entomological collection in combination with recent distribution patterns is a huge challenge and requires both personnel engagement and technical know-how. Our start-up project “Online database of Geometridae of Saxony, Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt” is not only an efficient research tool but also an application to engage the public.

The collection of the two lipped door snail (*Balea biplicata*) of West Saxony is particular for the *Malacological section*. The research of corresponding historic manuscripts and field data and the determination and digitalization are challenging future tasks (Clemens Kleindienst 1945/1946). In cooperation with amateur researchers and volunteers, the regional collection of other terrestrial and freshwater Mollusca was documented and determined (Enzenross and Enzenross 1996). Their studies provide new insights into the zoogeography of this group. Furthermore Trübsbach published results on the distribution of Gastropods along the

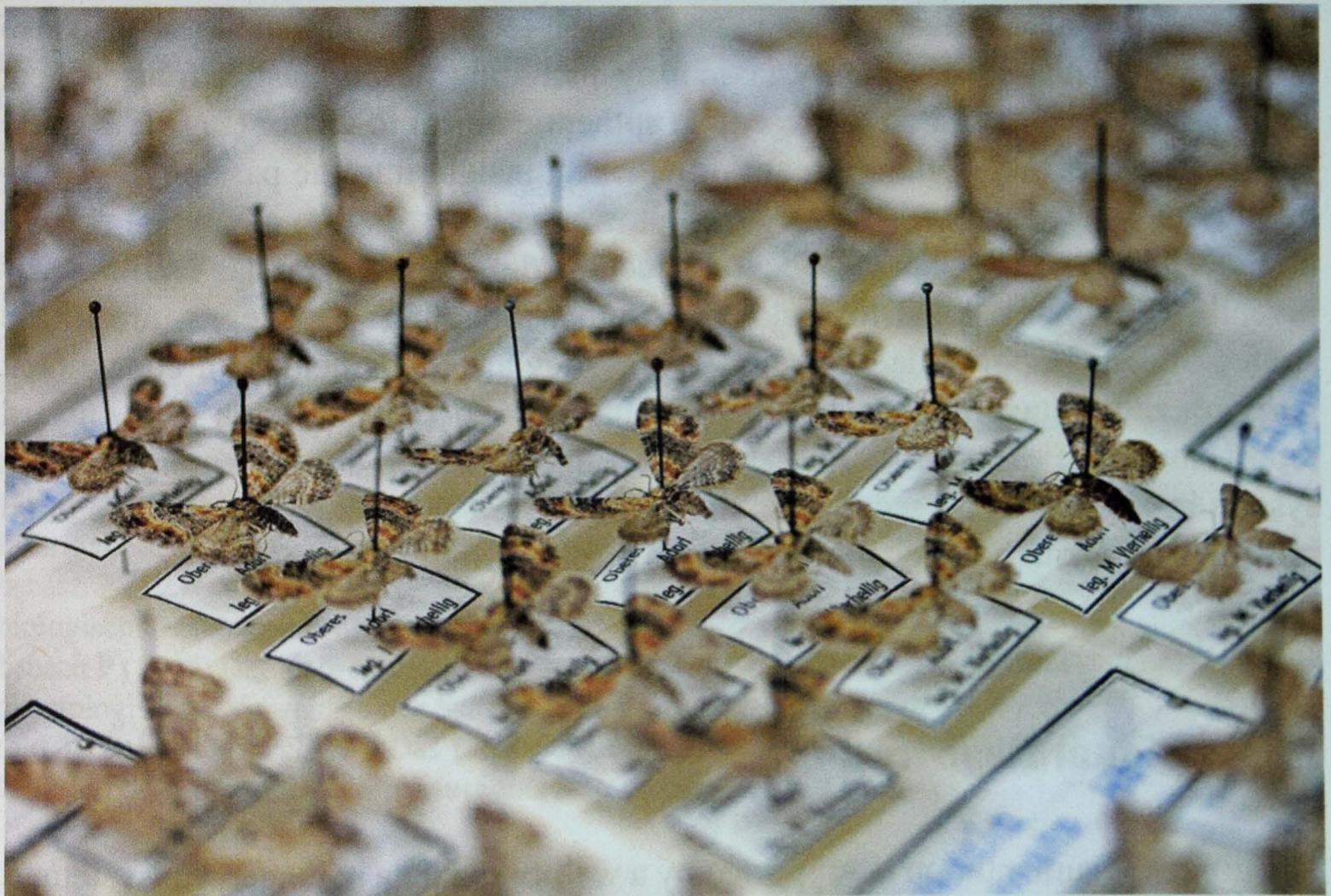


Fig. 19.2 Historical collections highlighting the ecological shift of the entomofauna due to growing urbanization in the area of Western Saxony (with permission from: Museum für Naturkunde Chemnitz; photo: MfNC)

Fig. 19.3 Great argus in courtship with hen. The exhibits prepared for the temporary exhibition “1 + 1 = SEX – The love life of animals” by taxidermist Holger Rathaj (with permission from: Museum für Naturkunde Chemnitz; photo: MfNC)



Zschopau valley and physiological experiments of the carbonate metabolism in freshwater Mollusca (Trübsbach 1934, 1947).

Historic *vertebrate* objects are often called stuffed exhibits. Prepared with seaweed or wooden wool, they hardly represent their natural anatomy and often prepared in excessively aggressive positions. However, these objects are relevant for the history of science in general and of taxidermy in specific, they act as cultural accelerators as mentioned by the communication theorist Derek de Klerkove (1995). Investigating the material and displays, stuffed exhibits can tell a story of their designer—the taxidermist. Trends in preparation techniques and materials can also be deduced. Thus contemporary taxidermy including dermoplastic, freeze-dried, and plastination established to present an authentic object to the visitor (Fig. 19.3). The vertebrate collection of the museum provides an insight into the passion of collectors in the early nineteenth century and allows the investigation of several preparation techniques with a special focus on local and regional avifauna. Traditionally juvenile vertebrates, local to regional avifauna including 1,350 eggs, are in the strategic focus of our collection (Fig. 19.4). They are fundamental for educational purposes and for taxonomic determination. Insurance documents from 1899 onward report about the growing vertebrate collection. However, the inventory number system in the vertebrate section did not start before 1963. Thus, digitalization and provenance research are challenging tasks in the vertebrate collection.

19.3 Digital Registration

The digital documentation is supported by a web-based data management system. It has been implemented in cooperation with CD-LAB Bonn and Saxony Regional Office of Museums. It is our short-term aim to increase transparency and to engage



Fig. 19.4 Bird egg collection with about 1350 exhibits goes back to 1920 (with permission from: Museum für Naturkunde Chemnitz)

citizens. Therefore we are working on the presence of our collection on the Web portal “museum digital.”

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