

The Goeldi Collection in Bern

Marcel GÜNTERT

Naturhistorisches Museum Bern, Schweiz

SUMMARY

In the years 1898-1911, the Natural History Museum Bern (NMBE) received a sizeable collection of vertebrates and insects from Brazil. The collection was donated by the Swiss zoologist Emil August GOELDI (or GÖLDI, 1859-1917), then director of the Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi (MPEG) in Belém (Pará, Brazil). Some of the specimens belonged to GOELDI's private collection; however, the majority were given as a permanent loan of the MPEG to the Museum in Bern to be kept as a reference collection outside the risks of the tropical climate.

GOELDI was born in eastern Switzerland and received his training as a zoologist at the universities of Leipzig and Jena, supervised by Oskar HERTWIG and Ernst HAECKEL. From 1884 to 1889 he was curator of vertebrates at the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro. In 1894 he was appointed director of the Museu Paraense in Belém. Founded in 1866, this museum – after a first period of prosperity – had reached a state of almost complete decay by 1890. GOELDI invited several scientists and taxidermists, mainly from Switzerland and Germany. The museum was soon revived, and also enlarged by a zoological and botanical garden.

It was to acknowledge GOELDI's services to the country in the political field as well as his merits as director of the museum, that the name 'Museu Paraense' was then changed into 'Museu Emílio Goeldi' (today Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi) by a governmental decree.

With regard to his professional activities, GOELDI was rather a jack-of-all-trades. Besides papers on taxon-

omy and faunistics of birds, mammals and fishes, he published articles on the biology of insects and on Amazonian archaeology. After his ultimate return to Switzerland he became professor of zoology at the University of Bern where he worked on the homology of arthropod mouth parts and on sex determination in honeybees.

In 1992, an inventory of the zoological collection, which had been donated by GOELDI to the NMBE, was compiled (GÜNTERT, M., GROSSENBACHER, K., HUBER, CH., AERNI, A. & MORGENTHALER, H. U. (1993): The E. A. Goeldi zoological collection in the Natural History Museum Bern: Comments on an inventory. *Jahrb. Naturhist. Mus. Bern* **11**: 147-161). The avian specimens amount to almost 3,000 – some 2,800 skins and 120 mounts – and include type specimens of at least three avian taxa: *Galbalcyrhynchus purusianus* GOELDI, 1905 (Piciformes, Galbulidae); *Pipra caelesti-pileata* GOELDI, 1905; *Pipra fasciicauda purusiana* SNETHLAGE, 1907 (Passeriformes, Pipridae). Some concerns occurred with respect to a considerable number of Trochilidae skins with GOULD collection and British Museum labels. They were thought to have been erroneously attributed to the GOELDI collection, but an investigation into the British Museum register revealed that they were given to the Museu Paraense in 1895 and that they are indeed part of the permanent loan to NMBE (GÜNTERT, STEINHEIMER & GESSNER, in press).

Dr. M. GÜNTERT, Naturhistorisches Museum, Bernstrasse 15, CH-2300 Bern, Schweiz. marcel.guentert@nmbe.unibe.ch