

History of the Zoological Teaching Collection

Objects, inventories, people, and networks



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Inventories from the Zoological Teaching Collection of today's Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. (Image: Theresa Schatt/Zoological Teaching Collection. All rights reserved.)

What can we learn about the objects and history of an institution by reading a collection's inventory books? How do a collection's holdings reflect its historical development?

The inventory books of the Zoological Teaching Collection of the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, now Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, were once a fixed component of everyday life at the institute. From 1884, they documented the acquisition of zoological specimens, models, and wall charts, which were used as visual aids. At the same time, the [inventory books](#) were used as a tool during the reorganisation of the collection. They have now long outlived their usefulness in this functional context, having been replaced by more efficient formats and media to organise information infrastructures, namely [index cards](#). Their significance is now primarily historical as they allow us to see the development of the collection holdings and implicitly refer to the history of the Zoological Institute, which was in charge of developing and managing the teaching collection.

A total of eight inventory books kept chronological records of specimens, models, and wall charts in a list with continuous numbering. The first inventory of specimens begins in the year the Zoological Institute was founded, 1884. It records not just the method of preservation and the Latin name but also information about where the object was acquired. The sources of the teaching collection's holdings were manifold – from the items it collected and then preserved itself at the institute to purchases from established natural history [traders](#) like Linnaeus in Berlin or the Hamburg firm Umlauff, and donations that were made by natural history institutions, including the Zoological Museum, the anatomical-zootomical collection, and the Zoological Station in Naples. They let us trace the widely ramified [network](#) of natural history institutions that existed back then both in Berlin and beyond, a nexus of which the Zoological Institute also formed one part. In the early years after its founding, the holdings of the teaching collection comprised above all gifts from the zoological and anatomical-zootomical collections of the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin.¹

Originally located under the roof of the university building in three subcollections, the zoological, anatomical-zootomical, and mineralogical collections were united in 1889 in a newly constructed museum building. This change in location was symptomatic of the complex relationship between the museum and university institutions at the time. During the 19th century, museums and their collections increasingly developed into self-sufficient sites of scientific practice and representation. At the same time, they assumed a teaching function in academic training but were still intended to make a considerable impact in *Volksbildung* – popular [education](#).² This twofold function of the university collections manifested itself in Berlin in the appointment of the museum directorship, which since 1810 had been linked with the chair of the discipline in question at the university. Due to the gradual establishment of zoology as a discipline independent of medicine, however, this appointment became a matter of discussion, additionally fuelled by successive differentiations and specialisations in the field of zoological research.³ After the 1883 death of Wilhelm Peters, director of the Zoological Museum, attempts were made to restructure the chair to reflect contemporary research standards, which together with the [systematisation](#) of zoology also pursued aspects of the theory of descent and development, and took experimental physiological approaches.⁴ These negotiations ultimately resulted in the founding of a new Zoological Institute, separate from the Zoological Museum, with its own teaching

collection, which was put under the leadership of sponge expert Franz Eilhard Schulze.



In front of the west wing of the Zoological Institute are institute director Franz Eilhard Schulze (centre) with his assistants Karl Heider (left) and Eugen Korschelt (right), as well as collection curator Fritz Mährenthal (far right), at the inauguration of the recently built museum building on 20 April 1888. The main entrance of the institute is decorated with a painting by C. Krohse, who also produced wall charts for the teaching collection. (Source: Elsi Hedström/Henschel. All rights reserved.)⁵

In the period that followed, both of the tenured zoology professors focused on the field of zoological systematics, which meant that there was no clear specialist separation between the content of their research, which was what had been originally intended.⁶ It was a different story with regard to the function fulfilled by the respective zoological collections, because, unlike the collection of the Zoological Museum, which had been established as a research collection, the strict focus of the Zoological Teaching Collection was its practical value in university teaching.⁷ A 1910 article in the newspaper *Berliner Akademische Nachrichten* reported the following:

“From the one-sided standpoint of the in itself indispensable systematic description of animals, zoology has developed into a science that encompasses not just the entirety of animal morphology but also histology, developmental history, and animal physiology, and which endeavours to trace the phenomenon back to its causes by means of experiment. Under the leadership of its long-standing director, the institute has striven to do justice to these extensive and manifold tasks in every direction by putting itself at the service of instruction and independent research to the greatest possible extent. The collections primarily serve teaching purposes and are an indispensable aid in lectures and courses.”⁸

The collection holdings were also shaped in accordance with this practical purpose as the inventory lists show. Alongside roughly 6,270 zoological specimens, the institute also procured around 1,945 wall charts and about 460 models during Schulze’s tenure.⁹ Today, it is only possible to reconstruct these acquisitions by looking at the inventory books, which were kept continuously and meticulously above all from 1884 to 1917, that is, under the direction of Franz Eilhard Schulze. From 1884 to about 1940, they documented the holdings’ constant growth and the expansion of the Zoological Teaching Collection. As early as at the beginning of the 20th century, the teaching collection of the Zoological Institute was considered “one of the biggest [teaching collections] in Germany [...]”.¹⁰

It only became possible to expand the collection when the Zoological Museum moved into the new museum building at Invalidenstraße 43. In its early years, the teaching collection had been forced to make do with the limited space available in the university building at Opernplatz.¹¹ This had had a negative impact on, for example, the way the collection was ordered and its items positioned in the designated cases, which were supposed to classify and present the objects systematically but were described as “provisional” up until the move in 1889.¹² In the museum building, by contrast, the Zoological Institute had the entire west wing at its disposal, with a surface area of 2,554 sqm. The *Proceedings of the 5th International Zoologists’ Congress* in 1901 described the structure of the collection in its new premises as follows:

“In order to procure the demonstration objects, specimens, models, wall charts, and other similar objects quickly and easily, there are two larger collection rooms next to the large auditorium on the second floor that receive items for the teaching collection; one of them contains the vertebrates and molluscs, the other arthropods and lesser animals, as well as the wall charts.”¹³

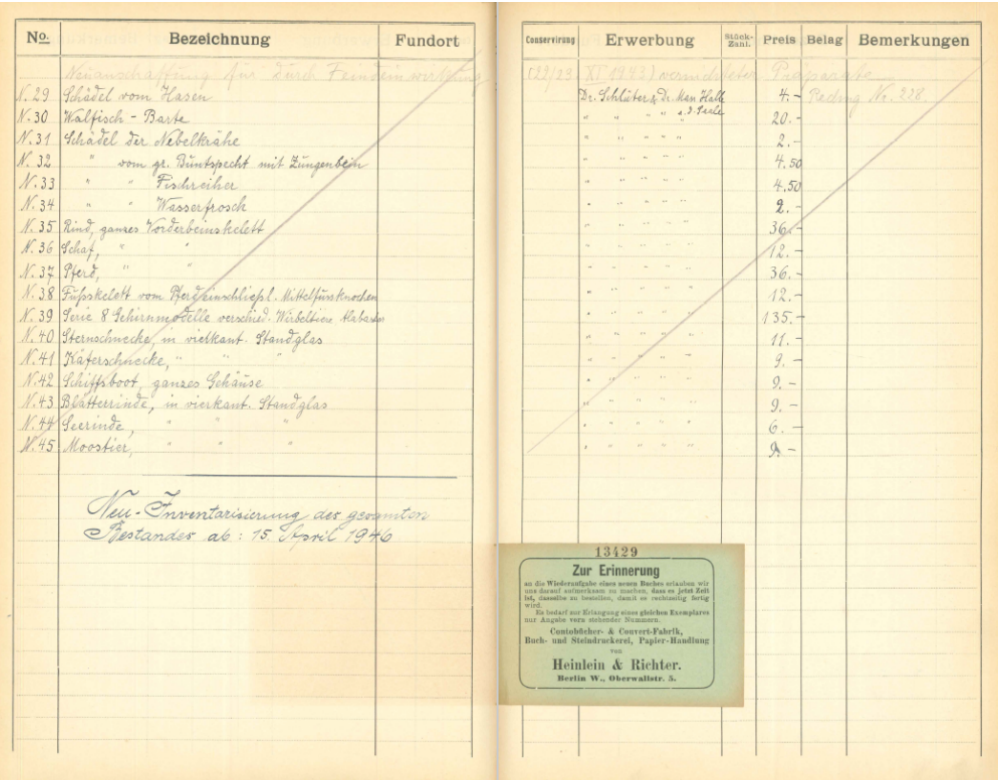
After a period of almost continuous growth up until the beginning of the Second World War, a bombing in the night of 22/23 November 1943 destroyed the Zoological Institute’s entire vertebrate collection. National Socialism had already had an impact on everyday life at the institution. For example, so few new objects arrived that object acquisitions for 1937-1943 comprise only half a page in the designated inventory book. Moreover, there is a change in handwriting, which indicates a change in staff.

No.	Bezeichnung	Fundort	Conservierung	Erwerbung	gesch. Zahl	Preis	Belag	Bemerkungen
6557	Hyalimma lamellata L.	Ergebnisse der Reise	Alkohol	Wegener durch R. W. W.	1			
6558	Canis lupus L.	"	"	Alfred Wegener	2			
6559	Forma capensis L.	Ergebnisse der Reise	"	"	1			Wegener durch R. W. W.
6560	Canis lupus L.	Alfred Wegener (Feldpost)	"	"	1			
6561	Canis lupus L.	Alfred Wegener	Trocken	"	2			
6562	Canis lupus L.	Alfred Wegener	Trocken	Wegener durch R. W. W.	1			Wegener durch R. W. W.
6563	Canis lupus L.	Alfred Wegener	"	"	1			"
6564	Canis lupus L.	Alfred Wegener	"	"	1			"
6565	Canis lupus L.	Alfred Wegener	Trocken	Prof. Dr. K. K. K.	40,50			
6566	Canis lupus L.	Alfred Wegener	"	"	52,-			
6567	Canis lupus L.	Alfred Wegener	Alkohol	Prof. Dr. K. K. K.	619	174,50		
6568	Canis lupus L.	Alfred Wegener	"	"	92	210,-		
6569	Canis lupus L.	Alfred Wegener	Trocken	"	32	69,-		

The "Inventory of Specimens Chap. V(2)", i.e., inventory book V(2), lists the few items that arrived in the period 1937-1943. The entries for these seven years take up just half of one double page. Moreover, changes in handwriting point to staff reshuffling. (Zoological Teaching Collection. All rights reserved.)

After becoming head of the institute in 1937, Friedrich Seidel was conscripted into the Wehrmacht as an officer in August 1939. Heinrich Jakob Feuerborn, also a member of the NSDAP, replaced him during his absence.¹⁴ He estimated the damages that had been incurred during the war at 87,250 RM, which included the loss of 100 skeletons, 500 taxidermies, five wax model series, and 200 dry invertebrate specimens.¹⁵ It was the deepest rupture in the history of the collection.

The postwar period was shaped by reconstruction work. The collection and teaching rooms had to be cleared of debris, rubble, and ash, and then repaired. The first step in this process was making an inventory of the existing, intact collection holdings.¹⁶ Taking a look at the inventories that documented this survey and process of reorganisation helps here as well. In one of the books, we find a comment about the “acquisition of specimens obliterated by enemy action, 22/23. XI. 1943” and a “reinventories of all holdings” announced for 16 April 1946. Just a few days before, on 9 April 1946, regular teaching activities had resumed.



In the “Inventory of Specimens Chap. V(2)” there is an announcement about the reinventory and a note about the bombing on 22 and 22 November 1943. (Zoological Teaching Collection. All rights reserved.)

Loss, destruction, and new beginnings did not just shape the development of the institute but are also mirrored in the history of the teaching collection’s holdings. Numerous items were lost or broken and had to be replaced; former holdings had to be identified and reclassified. These activities stretched into the 1950s, or at least this is the story told by the inventory books, in particular inventory book VII, which no longer followed a continuous system but displayed new numberings and lists.

Ultimately, record-keeping using inventory books was completely abandoned in the late 1960s. One of the last entries in the wall chart inventory that can be clearly dated is number 2938: “Map from 1967, printmaker Herr Hornuff”.¹⁷ The following year, in 1968, there was another rupture in the history of the institution. Upheavals in educational politics once more led to heavy losses of collection materials. During the GDR’s third university reform, the Zoological Institute was merged with the Agricultural and Gardening Faculty (formerly the Agricultural University). Back then, the Institute of Zoology at the Agricultural and Gardening Faculty had its own zoological collection, which was then merged with the holdings of the teaching collection.¹⁸ The aim of the reform was to promote stronger interdisciplinary research by dissolving existing institutional structures.¹⁹ The organisational form of the “section” – “Sektion” – took the place of institutions and faculties to represent the scientific subdisciplines. From then on, both institutes were part of the behavioural science department in the biology section.²⁰

This discontinuity has inscribed itself into the corpus of the historical collection as a caesura and void, for, in 1970, the section head made the decision to reduce the size of the teaching collection.²¹ Duplicates were donated, given or thrown

away, and, according to anecdotes, were even buried in the rear courtyard of the former institute.²² This is still making it difficult to (identify) specific specimens as (former) items from the teaching collection.

Footnotes

1. This included 779 duplicates of zoological specimens from the zoological collection. First given to the Zoological Institute on loan, they were permanently incorporated into the teaching collection in 1886, which can be inferred from correspondence between Franz Eilhard Schulze and the Prussian Ministry. Cf. MfN HUB, Schr. Best. Zool. Mus., Abt. II (die Errichtung des zool. Instituts, sowie die Abgabe von Büchern, Sammlungsstücken und Präparaten an dasselbe), vol. I. 1884-1889; Ilse Jahn. "Zur Vertretung der Zoologie und zur Entwicklung ihrer institutionellen Grundlagen an der Berliner Universität von ihrer Gründung bis 1920". *Wiss. Z. Humboldt-Univ. Berlin, Math. Nat. Reihe* 34, no. 3/4 (1985): 276.↵

2. Carsten Kretschmann. *Räume öffnen sich: Naturhistorische Museen im Deutschland des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006: 32.↵

3. Jahn, 1985: 275.↵

4. Ibid.↵

5. This image is from the private collection of Elsi Hedström, the granddaughter of Franz Eilhard Schulze. The people depicted have been identified by Stefan Richter; cf. "Franz Eilhard Schulze und die Zoologische Lehrsammlung der Berliner Universität". In *Theater der Natur und Kunst: Theatrum Naturae et Artis*, Horst Bredekamp, Jochen Brüning, and Cornelia Weber (eds.). Berlin: Henschel, 2000: 119-134, 121.↵

6. Günther Tembrock. "Zur Geschichte der Zoologie in Berlin". *Wiss. Z. der Humboldt-Univ. Berlin. Math.-Naturw. Reihe* 8, no. 2 (1958/59): 185-196, 193.↵

7. Cf. Günther Tembrock. "Die Geschichte des Zoologischen Instituts". *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Beiheft zum Jubiläumsjahrgang* 9 (1959/1960): 107-125; Gerhard Scholtz. "Zoologische Lehrsammlung (Zoological Teaching Collection)". In *Zoological Collections of Germany: The Animal Kingdom in its Amazing Plenty at Museums and Universities*, Lothar A. Beck (ed.). Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018: 124.↵

8. Wilhelm Paszkowski. "Das Zoologische Institut der Universität Berlin: N 4, Invalidenstr. 43; Museum für Naturkunde". *Berliner Akademische Nachrichten* 11 (1910): 2.↵

9. Stefan Richter. "Die Lehrsammlung des Zoologischen Instituts der Berliner Universität: Ihre Geschichte und ihre Bedeutung". *Sitzungsberichte der Gesellschaft Naturforschender Freunde zu Berlin (N.F.)* 37 (1999): 59-76.↵

10. Tembrock, 1959/1960: 112.↵

11. Cf. Jahn, 1985: 275f.↵

12. "While in the earlier provisional order of the teaching collection the models had been set up in special cabinets, separate from the specimens, during the reorganisation of the teaching collection undertaken this year using the newly assembled cabinets, all models were organised in the same systematic order as the specimens. [...] After putting the collection items, which had previously been accommodated only provisionally, in a clear order for the first time, the next task was to work through the items more precisely and systematically, and, as it had become necessary in some cases, to remount them." Anonymous. "Chronik der königlichen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin für das Rechnungsjahr 1889/90". In *Chronik der Friedrich-Wilhelm-Universität*, vol. 3. Berlin, 1889/90: 130. https://www.digi-hub.de/viewer/image/1603900356647/1/LOG_0003/ (20.06.2021).↵

13. Anonymous. "Mitteilungen über naturwissenschaftliche Anstalten Berlins für die Mitglieder des V. internationalen Zoologen-Congresses": 1.↵

14. Richter, 1999: 62f.↵

15. According to an appraisal carried out by Heinrich Jakob Feuerborn on 27.01.1945, quoted in Günther Tembrock. "Das Zoologische Institut der Humboldt-Universität von 1945 bis zur Gründung der Sektion Biologie". *Wiss. Z. der Humboldt-Univ. Berlin. Math.-Nat. Reihe* (1985): 281. In addition, a loss of around 600 wall charts during the war and in the postwar period can be surmised from the inventory records; see Richter, 1999: 67. Specimens preserved in alcohol survived the attack, as they had been taken to the basement rooms together with some other holdings from the museum collection as a precaution; cf. Hannelore Landsberg and Ferdinand Damaschun. "Das Museum im Bombenhagel und unter Schutt". In *Klasse, Ordnung, Art: 200 Jahre Museum für Naturkunde*. Ferdinand Damaschun et al. (eds.). Rangsdorf: Basiliken-Presse, 2010: 228; Tembrock, 1985: 281.↵

16. Cf. Tembrock, 1985: 281.↵

17. Stefan Richter uses this entry to illustrate that the inventory books were kept up until the section assumed management in 1968; cf. Richter, 1999: 67.↵

18. Tembrock, 1985: 289f.↵

19. Ekkehard Höxtermann. "Biologien in der DDR zwischen Tradition und Innovation, Wissenschaft und Politik". In *Naturwissenschaft und Technik in der DDR*, reprint, Dieter Hoffmann and Kristie Macrakis (eds.). Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2018: 233-259.↵

20. Cf. Richter, 1999: 59-76, 65.↵

21. Cf. Ibid.↵

22. Cf. Ibid.↵