



Ch. pluvialis. L.  
Ch. apricarius. Gm. Lat.  
Ch. auratus. Bechst.  
Goldregenpfeifer.  
Mark. 1302 / S. J. G. ff

Charadrius Pluvialis  
Linn.  
Mark 1302

The ornithological collection of the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin includes a taxidermy bird mounted on a wooden pedestal. It is a representative of the *Pluvialis apricaria* species, a Eurasian golden plover, whose name comes from the golden spotted plumage on its head and back. This golden plover is significant for the history of the Berlin Kunstammer because of the label attached to the pedestal and the entries relating to the object in the historical collection catalogues of the museum. Not only does the label note various species designations that were used in the past, the site where the animal was found, and the inventory number assigned after 1856, but both the label and the catalogue entries also indicate that the Eurasian golden plover with the inventory number ZMB Aves 13021 had been transferred to the collection of the Berlin University's Zoological Museum from the Royal Kunstammer (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup>

Also recorded as having come from the Kunstammer (figs. 2–4) are twenty-one other mounted specimens, five prepared bird skins, and the beak of a hornbill that are presently part of the ornithological collection of the Museum für Naturkunde, into which the Zoological Museum was merged.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, there are also antlers and taxidermy specimens and skins in the mammal collection as well as several squids recorded as wet specimens in the mollusc collection that, on the basis of labels and catalogue entries, can be identified as having come from the Kunstammer (fig. 5).<sup>3</sup> The Eurasian golden plover therefore serves as an example of all those specimens that on royal orders were made available from the Kunstammer when the Zoological Museum of the university was established for research and teaching.<sup>4</sup> Its history offers insights into the collecting of zoological specimens in Berlin at the turn of the nineteenth century, a time when, in addition to the royal collection, there were also hundreds of private collections in the city.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the object encourages a critical reflection of the records of the Museum für Naturkunde in which “Kunstammer” is noted in the provenance data.

### Royal Ownership

The Eurasian golden plover and the other extant ornithological taxidermy specimens had all been entered in the *Verzeichnis der Vögelsammlung* (Inventory of the Bird Collection), prepared in May 1812 by Johann Karl Wilhelm Illiger, director of the Zoological Museum, as specimens originating from the Royal Kunstammer. Regarding two of the Eurasian golden plovers listed by Illiger under the species name *Charadrius pluvialis*, one was in “spring” and the other in “autumn plumage”.<sup>6</sup> The former is most probably the Eurasian golden plover that later received the inventory number ZMB Aves 13021, since it has the black or dark brown plumage on the belly typical of the breeding or spring colours. In addition to the specimens still in the collection today, Illiger's inventory also included more than 500 other bird specimens with “Royal Kunstammer” listed as the provenance.

The large number of animals that, according to Illiger's inventory, had come from the Kunstammer mostly agrees with the data that Jean Henry, long-time director of the Kunstammer, entered

◀ 1 | Mounted specimen of a Eurasian golden plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) with the inventory number ZMB Aves 13021, which according to the historical label was transferred from the Kunstammer to the Zoological Museum.

- 1 On natural history inventory practices at the time the museum was founded, see MacKinney 2020.
- 2 Database ZMB Aves (22 July 2021). I would like to thank Sylke Frahner, Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, for making the data available, and Jürgen Fiebig for valuable information for this text.
- 3 After sales and transfers of multiple species that had been in the collection in the first half of the nineteenth century and after the destruction during the Second World War, almost fifty zoological objects from the Kunstammer could be documented in the Museum für Naturkunde. See the database ZMB Aves (22 July 2021); Specify-Database Mammalia (11 November 2021); Theater der Natur und Kunst 2000, cat. vol., pp. 131–5; see also the information on the scientific collections of the Humboldt University, <https://www.sammlungen.hu-berlin.de> (accessed 11 November 2021).
- 4 See Jahn 1985, p. 261. On the oldest holdings of the ornithological collection, see Steinheimer 2005. The total number of objects or details on the animal species that became part of the founding collection of the Zoological Museum in this way cannot be determined on the basis of extant documents. Nor can the numbers be verified that August Brauer, then director of the Zoological Museum, referred to in 1910 on the occasion of the museum's centennial. See also Brauer 1910, p. 373; Angermann 1989, p. 47.
- 5 Heesen 2001, p. 63; Ennenbach 1980.
- 6 Illiger 1812, fol. 40r.



2 | The Eurasian golden plover in a group of other taxidermy bird specimens that were displayed as Kunstammer objects in the exhibition *Theatrum naturae et artis: Miraculous Chambers of Knowledge* (Berlin, Martin-Gropius-Bau, 2000–2001).

3–4 | The Eurasian golden plover and the two extant skins of northern bobwhites (Virginia quails, *Colinus virginianus*, top row left) from the Kunstammer among other members of their species in the collection of the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin.

into his catalogue in 1805 [●Around 1800].<sup>7</sup> However, they do not match the few taxidermy birds listed in the 1793 Kunstammer inventory. The surviving copy of this inventory “of the objects located in the royal art and naturalia cabinet” lists hardly any birds. Instead of the golden plover and the other extant taxidermy bird specimens with “Kunstammer” recorded as their provenance, only individual eggs and two birds of paradise are registered in the 1793 inventory.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, those birds with a label and catalogue entries indicating that they came from the Kunstammer must have been new additions to the royal collection between 1793 and 1805.

In August 1802, the bird collection in the rooms of the Kunstammer in the palace did not yet fill even one wall, and the naturalia holdings in general, as compared with other “imperial and royal or even . . . electoral and ducal collections abroad”, were instead rather “meagre” [◆Canon and Transformation].<sup>9</sup> According to Jean Henry, who advocated incorporating the private collections into the Royal Kunstammer, this was noticed not only by “foreign” visitors, who were at the very least surprised or even sneered at the “impoverished natural history collection of the king of Prussia”.<sup>10</sup> Even the king himself, when visiting the Kunstammer in the winter of 1801, evidently expressed his embarrassment that natural history was not a strength of his collection.<sup>11</sup> In order to correct this shortcoming, he commissioned the purchase of several private natural history collections, for which a new room was established.<sup>12</sup>

7 Henry 1805, p. 12; see also Dolezel 2019, p. 25.

8 *Verzeichnis Naturalien* 1793, fols. 301–2.

9 ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I–XV–29, fol. 22v.

10 *Ibid.*, fol. 23r.

11 *Ibid.*, fol. 22v.

12 On the layout of the room, see Dolezel 2019, pp. 83–7.





5 | Horns of a banteng (a species of wild cattle) with provenance marked as “Royal Kunstkammer” in the Ungulates Hall of the Museum für Naturkunde

Previously, the ornithological objects in the Kunstkammer had included only ostrich eggs and birds of paradise, which had already become part of the collection in the late seventeenth century.<sup>13</sup> These objects were also retained in the Kunstkammer when the major part of the naturalia, including several eggs and bird of paradise specimens, was transferred to the Academy of Sciences on royal orders in 1735 [■ Monkey Hand].<sup>14</sup> Among the objects intended for the Academy collection were also, aside from the birds made “incorruptible” by lacquerwork artist Gérard Dagly [◆ Changing Focuses] and taxidermy animals that had lived in Potsdam and Berlin, a number of beaks such as that “of a Brazilian bird called an aracari, whose tongue is like a feather”, and three beaks from rhinoceros hornbills.<sup>15</sup> There were three such hornbill beaks in the collection of the Zoological Museum in 1812, which according to Illiger’s inventory had been transferred from the Kunstkammer to the newly founded university museum (figs. 6–7).<sup>16</sup>

However, those beaks must have been passed on to the Zoological Museum from the Academy collection, as such objects – beaks, bones, and eggs, as well as entire birds – had been transferred from the Kunstkammer to the Academy in 1735 and were part of the founding collection of the Zoological Museum.<sup>17</sup> The Royal Academy of Sciences is not mentioned as the collector or donor of the objects in either the historical catalogues or on the labels of the bird collection of the Zoo-

logical Museum. Instead, in the “by whom?” column of Illiger’s inventory, only a few names of individuals are noted in addition to the Royal Kunstkammer: Carl Ludwig Willdenow, Peter Simon Pallas, Johann Centurius Graf von Hoffmannsegg, and Coenraad Jacob Temminck.<sup>18</sup> Could, for example, the blue tit (*Parus coeruleus*) or the willow warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*), which are listed in Illiger’s 1812 inventory as having come from the Kunstkammer, actually be specimens from the Academy collection?<sup>19</sup>

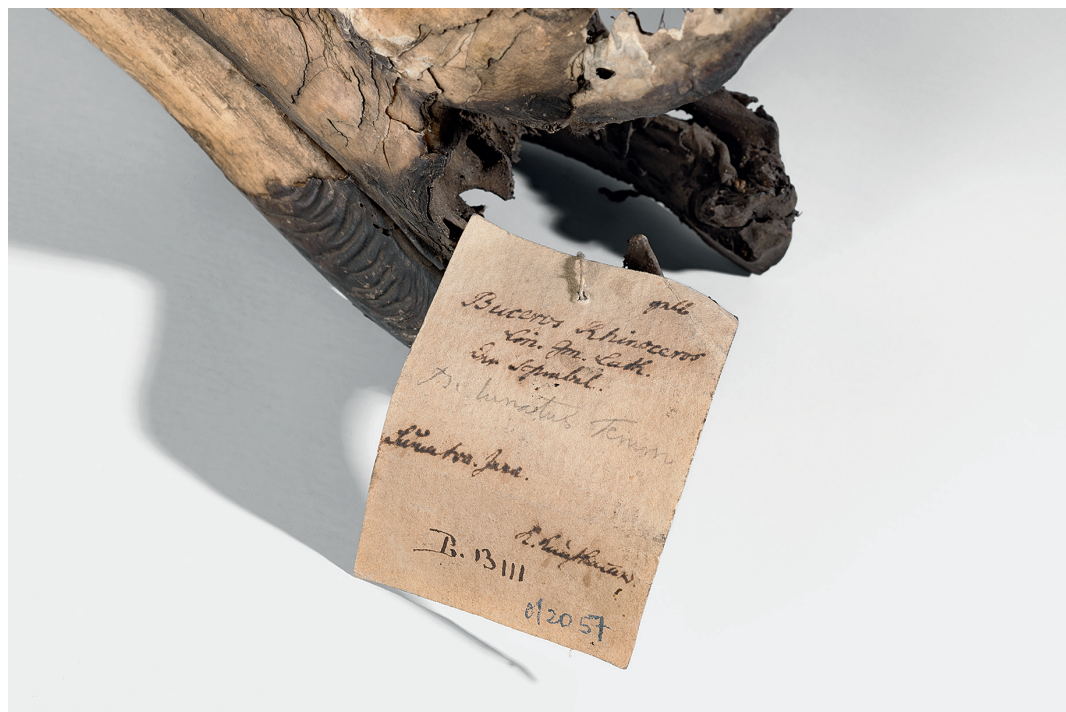
That is not unlikely, as the Kunstkammer and the Academy collection were united around 1800 under the supervision of the Academy, and the Academy collection was also displayed in the palace [●Around 1800].<sup>20</sup> No golden plover is indicated in the 1770 catalogue of the Academy’s naturalia collection.<sup>21</sup> Nor can the numerous other specimens listed in Illiger’s 1812 inventory of the bird collection as having come from the Kunstkammer be explained solely by suggestions that the bird specimens from the Academy collection might have been mislabelled when added to the collection of the Zoological Museum.

### From Private Hands?

The golden plover and most of the other extant Kunstkammer birds must have first arrived in the royal collection through purchases and gifts of private collections around 1800. Those responsible for the collection acquired several zoological specimens in May 1799 through the auction of a private collection in Amsterdam. In October of the same year, the publisher Friedrich Nicolai



6–7 | Beak of a rhinoceros hornbill (*Buceros rhinoceros*) and its label, indicating that it came from the Kunstkammer.



- 13 *Verzeichnis Naturalien* 1793.
- 14 The Academy archive contains a detailed breakdown of which naturalia were to be transferred; see *Verzeichnis* 1735.
- 15 *Ibid.*, fols. 1r, 14r. Regarding corresponding objects in other historical collections, see, for example, Samietz 2014.
- 16 Illiger 1812, fol. 28r.
- 17 Jahn 1985, p. 261.
- 18 Illiger 1812.
- 19 The willow warbler is entered there as *Motacilla trochilus*; see ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I–XV–22, fol. 13r.
- 20 GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 96 A Geheimes Kabinett, Nr. 1 E, Kunst-, Naturalien-, Medaillen- und Münzkabinett, fols. 64–65; ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I–XV–27. See Jahn 1985, pp. 260–1.
- 21 ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I–XV–22.

donated two hundred taxidermy birds to the royal collection. Several hundred specimens were acquired in 1801 through the purchase of the collection of the physician Marcus Élieser Bloch, and another two hundred followed in 1805 with the purchase of the collection of the deceased senior medical officer Johann Andreas Riemer.<sup>22</sup> Can the golden plover be traced back to one of these private collections?

Neither the historical catalogues of the bird collection of the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin nor the database of the ornithological collection permit a direct answer to this question, since Bloch, Nicolai, and Riemer are as hard to find in these inventories as collectors or donors as is the Academy.<sup>23</sup> Nor have their names been discovered thus far on any labels of the roughly 11,000 mounted specimens and 140,000 skins.<sup>24</sup> Only detailed inventories of the respective private collections could offer information about the taxidermy bird specimens collected by Bloch, Nicolai, and Riemer and about the provenance of the Eurasian golden plover.

The collection of Johann Andreas Riemer purchased in 1805 included minerals, beautifully cut agates and marble plates, an extensive collection of mollusc shells, and an insect collection comprising 5500 specimens, as well as “200 stuffed . . . mostly exotic” birds that had been missing until then in the collection of the Prussian king.<sup>25</sup> However, it is impossible to determine precisely what species these were. The files only clearly show that numerous representatives of the hummingbird family were among them, and that two-thirds of the bird species in Riemer’s collection had previously been lacking in the royal collection. The written sources also confirm that prior to the purchase, the condition of Riemer’s collection had been appraised as “excellent”.<sup>26</sup>

The two hundred “stuffed” birds, on the other hand, that the Academy had received in early 1800 as a gift of Friedrich Nicolai, were in such terrible condition that they first had to be restored [♦ Intact and Damaged]. In Nicolai’s case, as well, it is unclear what species of birds were included in the collection, as the invoice for the repair of the bird specimens listed only the quantities.<sup>27</sup> As with Riemer, no correspondence or other written notes on his collections are extant.<sup>28</sup> Thus, it is impossible based on existing documents to determine if the birds purchased from Riemer’s estate or those donated by Nicolai also included the golden plover that Illiger had listed in 1812 as having come from the Kunstkammer.

### Bloch's Birds?

The situation was very different regarding the records of the naturalia collection of the physician Marcus Élieser Bloch. During his lifetime, they had already been presented in Berlin descriptions and in international publications on collections. Bloch’s collection also included a great number of diverse natural history objects; although this fact has largely since been forgotten, it contained not only the birds and the better-researched fish holdings, but also minerals, fossils, molluscs, insects, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals.<sup>29</sup> According to the catalogue prepared following the sale, the bird collection consisted of eighteen cases, some of which displayed up to twenty specimens at once. This included several species that were later also present in the bird collection of the Zoological Museum, such as a roseate spoonbill, a black-headed gull, a little bittern, and a partridge, as well as several ruffs (fig. 8).<sup>30</sup>

22 See Dolezel 2019, p. 76. On the acquisition of Nicolai’s bird collection, see ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I–XV–27, fols. 18–19; on the purchase of Bloch’s collection, see ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I–XV–29; MfN, HBSB, ZM, S I, Bloch, vols. 1–4; on the purchase of Riemer’s collection, see ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I–XV–32, fol. 10; GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 96 A Geheimes Kabinett, Nr. 1 E, Kunst-, Naturalien-, Medaillen- und Münzkabinett.  
 23 On the catalogues of the bird collection, see Frahnert 2016.  
 24 Database ZMB Aves (22.07.2021). See Steinheimer 2005, pp. 47–8.  
 25 ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I–XV–32, fol. 11.  
 26 Ibid.; GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 96 A Geheimes Kabinett, Nr. 1 E, Kunst-, Naturalien-, Medaillen- und Münzkabinett, fols. 87–8.  
 27 ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I–XV–27, fols. 45–59.  
 28 On Nicolai, see Friedrich Nicolai 2012; on his collections, esp. pp. 87–95.  
 29 Nicolai 1786a, p. 813; Rumpf 1793, p. 121. On the fish collection, see e.g. Karrer 1978; Paepke 1999.  
 30 MfN, HBSB, ZM, S I, Bloch, vol. 2, fol. 5r (*Platalea ajaja*), 7r (*Larus ridibundus*), 22r (*Ardea minuta*), 28v (*Tetrao perdix*), 23r (*Tringa pugnax*).



According to Illiger's inventory, the representatives of these bird species that were in the university's Zoological Museum in 1812 came from the Royal Kunstkammer. The only other collectors named were Carl Ludwig Willdenow, Peter S. Pallas, Johann Centurius Hoffmannsegg, and Coenraad Jacob Temminck. Bloch, however, was not explicitly mentioned, nor was he documented on the labels of the ornithological collection of the Museum für Naturkunde.<sup>31</sup>

It is nevertheless likely that the aforementioned bird species such as ruff and roseate spoonbill originally came from Bloch's collection, since after Friedrich Wilhelm III had bought the collection, it was displayed in the Berlin palace together with the holdings of the Kunstkammer, the Academy collection, and other private collections.<sup>32</sup> Whereas Bloch's fish collection was always perceived as a unit due to his widely known ichthyologic publications, and even today, the specimens once again have a separate place within the fish collection of the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, the bird specimens from various sources were arranged according to their taxonomy.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, the roseate spoonbill, black-headed gull, little bittern, partridge, and ruff were presumably not specimens brought together for the Kunstkammer, but instead were objects that Marcus Élieser Bloch had collected in the eighteenth century. In the course of Illiger's cataloguing of the birds in the Zoological Museum in 1812, they were merged in the collection under the label "Kunstkammer".

A look at the holdings of the mammal collection of the Museum für Naturkunde appears to confirm this path for the objects.<sup>34</sup> Today, for example, there are specimens of a Chinese pangolin,

8 | Three specimens of the same species: female (reeve), juvenile, and male (ruff) of *Calidris pugnax* with Kunstkammer provenance.

31 Illiger 1812 recorded samples for the Kunstkammer for the following species: *Aetitis pugnax*, fol. 43v; *Platalea ajaja*, 46r; *Perdix cinerea*, 38r; *Larus ridibundus*, 48r; *Ixobrychus minutus* or *Ardea minuta*, 42r.

32 See Dolezel 2019, p. 82.

33 Paepke 1999.





a European polecat, a civet, and a lowland paca, which, according to their labels and their entries in the collection catalogues, all came from the Kunstkammer (figs. 9–12).<sup>35</sup> None of these animal species were already in the Kunstkammer by the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>36</sup> Marcus Élieser Bloch, on the other hand, owned specimens of all these mammals.<sup>37</sup> In addition to objects such as narwhal tusks, whale penises [■ Priapus], and rhinoceroses, of which there were already specimens in the Kunstkammer, the physician also owned more than one hundred other mammal specimens.<sup>38</sup> Among them were also samples of those species that in 1831 were taken from the Kunstkammer holdings and given to “Rudolphi’s Anatomical Museum”, but which do not appear in the extant inventories from the period prior to the founding of the Zoological Museum, such as several human embryos, a three-toed sloth, and a dolphin skull.<sup>39</sup> All these objects, as well as Bloch’s birds, became royal property in 1802 and a few years later, together with the other naturalia of the Kunstkammer, were given to the newly founded Zoological Museum of the Berlin University.

9–10 | Mounted taxidermy specimen of a Chinese pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*, ZMB Mam 1929) and the skin of an African civet (*Civettictis civetta*, ZMB Mam 1084), which according to the labels and catalogue entries were transferred from the Kunstkammer to the Zoological Museum.

Accordingly, the Eurasian golden plover with the inventory number ZMB Aves 13021 probably also came from a private collection compiled in the eighteenth century. Whether it was Friedrich Nicolai, for instance, or Johann Andreas Riemer who acquired it for their cabinets can no longer be determined on the basis of the existing sources.<sup>40</sup> Only a short time after the university’s Zoological Museum was founded, knowledge about the objects from private collections that ended up in royal ownership had already been lost. With that, the Eurasian golden plover stands for the situation of private collectors vanishing behind the institution of the Kunstkammer. The bird’s biography can no longer be traced to the home of a Berlin publisher or doctor due to the fact that the collections were displayed together in the palace and because of the existing gaps in their provenance records. However, its history clearly shows that in the early nineteenth century, the purchases and gifts of zoological specimens



11–12 | Mounted taxidermy specimens of a European polecat (*Mustela putorius*, ZMB Mam 984) and a lowland or spotted paca (*Cuniculus paca*, ZMB Mam 1067).



not only greatly expanded the royal collection, but also had a lasting influence on it, so that it was able to have a long-term impact in various university and museum contexts.

Translated by Allison Brown

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- 34 On the history of the mammal collection, see Angermann 1989.
- 35 MfN, mammal collection, *Catalogus generalis Musei Zoologici Berolinensis, Mammalia I*, entries no. 1929 (*Manis pentadactyla*), 984 (*Mustela furo*), 1084 (*Viverra civetta*), 1067 (*Coelogenys paca*).
- 36 See *Verzeichnis Naturalien* 1793.
- 37 MfN, HBSB, ZM, S I, Bloch, vol. 1.1, fol. 4v (*Manis pentadactyla*; *Mustela furo*), 5r (*Viverra Zibetha, Cavia paca*).
- 38 *Ibid.*, fol. 5v (rhinoceros horns and narwhal tusk), 6r (*Priapus Ceti*).
- 39 *Ibid.*, fol. 3r (embryos), 4v (*Bradyus tridactylus*); 6r (dolphin skull); MfN, HBSB, ZM, S I, Kunstkammer, pp. 18–19. On the early history of the Anatomical-Zoatomical Museum, see Werner 2012. Some of the zoological objects in the Anatomical-Zoatomical collection were integrated into the university's Zoological Museum in 1887. See Jahn 1985, pp. 276–7.
- 40 On natural history collecting in eighteenth-century Berlin, see Heesen 2001; Ennenbach 1980.