

Early ornithological expeditions to Syrmia and Banat (1809–1855)

Rané ornitologické expedice do Syrmie a Banátu (1809 – 1855)

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Abstract. *A report of early ornithological expeditions to Syrmia and Banat is presented. These lands currently belong to the southern Vojvodina, Serbia, but in the past, they were a less safe region at the border between the Habsburg Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. The first who collected birds in the territory of Syrmia and Banat was Johann Natterer, an Austrian collector, in 1809. In 1834, Johann Salomon Petényi assumed the position of a curator of zoological collections in the Hungarian National Museum, and his activities opened the territory Hungary to foreign ornithologists. Simultaneously, the situation in Syrmia and Banat turned to the better and became more suitable for ornithological visits. Ornithological expeditions visited Syrmia and Banat in 1835 (Naumann), 1838 (Landbeck), 1840 (von Loebenstein), 1852 (Frič) and 1853–1855 (Zelevor). A first ornithologist, Ettinger, settled in the region in the mid-1850s. Consequently, the expedition era of ornithological explorations of Syrmia and Banat took its end and the era of standard ornithological research was commenced.*

Key words: *ornithology, history, faunistics, Serbia, Romania, Hungary*

Introduction

Syrmia and Banat are neighboring historical regions, the largest parts of which currently belong to the Vojvodina Province, Serbia. During most of the 19th century, they formed southernmost part of Hungary, which in turn was part of the Central European Habsburg Empire. Lying at the border with the Ottoman Empire, these regions were rather wild until the 1830s (Naumann 1837, pp. 109–110).

Extensive wetlands in Syrmia and southern Banat were the closest place where Central European ornithologists could encounter Mediterranean wetland and water birds. However attractive, the region was difficult to reach and considered dangerous in those days, so that very few ornithologists visited these regions prior to the 20th century.

The first and for a long time the only ornithologist who visited the region probably was Johann Centurius von Hoffmannsegg in 1794 (see below), but first ornithological work was done there by Johann Natterer in 1809 (see below), the same man, who later became famous due to his research in Brazil (Vanzolini 1993, Schmutzer 2011). The situation markedly changed in the 1830s when the situation in Syrmia and Banat started to improve and when János Salamon Petényi (1799 – 1855; also Johann Salomon von Petényi, Ján Šalamún Petian) was appointed as a curator of zoology at the Hungarian National Museum in Pest (December 1834). Petényi immediately started a campaign for the development of Hungarian natural history (Herman 1891, p. 30). His close contacts with Austrian and German ornithologists soon resulted in several expeditions to Syrmia and

Banat. Petényi participated in the expeditions of 1835 and 1838, but only acted as advisor for the expeditions of 1840 and 1852. Below I give brief account of these expeditions.

Museum acronyms are as follows: IZH = Institut für Zoologie, Halle/Saale, Germany; NMK = Naumann-Museum, Köthen, Germany; NHMW = Naturhistorisches Museum, Wien, Austria; NMP = National Museum, Praha, Czech Republic; RMNH = Naturalis (formerly Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie, Leiden, The Netherlands; SMND = Staatliches Museum für Naturkunde, Dresden, Germany; SMNG = Staatliches Museum für Naturkunde, Görlitz, Germany; ZMB = Museum für Naturkunde, Leibniz-Institut für Evolutions- und Biodiversitätsforschung, Humboldt-Universität, Berlin, Germany.

Gazetteer

Below I list localities from Banat, Syrmia and adjacent parts of Europe, which are mentioned in the text below. Alternative spellings and names are given in parentheses. Geographic coordinates are given in the decimal system. Spelling of toponyms follows NGA (2012) where possible.

Baziaş, Caraş-Severin Province, Romania; 44.81°N, 21.39°E.

Băile Herculane (Mehadia), Caraş-Severin Province, Romania; 44.88°N, 22.41°E.

Bela Crkva, South Banat, Vojvodina, Serbia; 44.92°N, 21.43°E.

Beograd, City of Beograd Province, Serbia; 44.82°N, 20.47°E.

Jakovo (Jacowa, Jakowa), Syrmia, Vojvodina, Serbia; 44.76°N, 20.26°E.

Kovilj, Central Banat, Vojvodian, Serbia; 45.23°N, 20.02°E.

Kupinovo (Kubinova, Kupinowa), Syrmia, Vojvodina, Serbia; 44.71°N, 21.35°E.

Obrež, Syrmia, Vojvodina, Serbia; 44.74°N, 19.97°E.

Opovo (Oppowa), South Banat, Vojvodina, Serbia; 45.05°N, 20.43°E.

Pančevo, South Banat, Vojvodina, Serbia; 44.87°N, 20.64°E.

Perlez, Central Banat, Vojvodina, Serbia; 45.21°N, 20.38°E.

Sremska Mitrovica (Mitrovitza), Syrmia, Vojvodina, Serbia; 44.98°N, 19.61°E.

Stajićevo (Etska), Central Banat, Vojvodina, Serbia; 45.29°N, 20.46°E.

Zemun (Semlin), Syrmia, Vojvodina, Serbia; 44.84°N, 20.40°E.

The expeditions

Below I list five ornithological expeditions to Syrmia and Banat from the beginnings (1809) to the end of the expedition era (1855). Brief visits by travelers are not considered below. However, two of them deserve a mention: First, Johann Centurius von Hoffmannsegg (1766–1849), a well known German naturalist, visited the region briefly in July 1794, crossing it from Petrovaradin to Zemun on the way to Băile Herculane (see Hoffmannsegg 1800, pp. 165ff.). Although Hoffmannsegg collected birds on other places during his expedition (see Hoffmannsegg 1800, pp. 126ff., Stresemann 1950, p. 44, footnote) I found nothing regarding his ornithological activities in what is now Vojvodina. Second, Herman (1891, p. 31) mentioned that Graf [= Count] Vieregg (perhaps Karl Mathäus von Vieregg, 1798–1864, who was of „correct“ age and had close connections with Hungary; cf. Gángó 1999, pp. 13ff.) visited “Banat” in 1835 (before Naumann did; see below for dates) in Petényi’s company. I was not able to find anything more about this expedition.

1809: Natterer Expedition

Johann Natterer (1787–1843) was an Austrian collector. He visited Banat and Syrmia in 1809. His itinerary was not published, but he visited Stajićevo and Perlez in Central Banat, Opovo and Pančevo in South Banat, and Zemun in Syrmia (see J. Natterer in Herman 1891, pp. 105–106). Collected birds were deposited in the NHMW (Fitzinger 1868, p. 1053). Ornithological results of this expedition were not published (but see Pelzeln 1874, p. 562 for a record of *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* (Pallas, 1773) from Perlez).

1835: Naumann Expedition

Johann Friedrich Naumann (1780–1857) was a famous German ornithologist (Gebhardt 1964), while his fellow traveler Ludwig August Neubert (1799–1880) was an apothecary in Leipzig, Germany.

Naumann and Neubert started their journey in Leipzig on 8 August 1835, reaching Pest via Praha, Wien and Pressburg [= Bratislava] on 20 August (they stayed in Wien for several days). There they met Petényi, who accompanied them until their homeward departure from Pest almost five weeks later. After some collecting in the vicinity of Pest, they went on 27 August to Zemun, from where they made excursions to various places in Syrmia and Banat. They continued their way on 9 September on land through Banat and further northwards to Pest, which they reached on 14 September. They explored the vicinity of Pest until 3 October, when they set off homewards. They reached Leipzig on 9 October. For a detailed itinerary see Naumann (1837, pp. 70–72; see also Naumann 1836, pp. v–viii).

Naumann probably retained most specimens he collected in his own collection, but he did not mention this in his reports (Naumann 1836, pp. v–viii, 1837). Large parts of the Naumann collection are now deposited in IZH and NMK (Roselaar 2003). Ornithological observations were published by Naumann (1837); in addition Naumann (1836, 1838, 1840, 1842, and 1844) included them in the volumes of his *Naturgeschichte der Vögel Deutschlands* published after his expedition.

1838: Landbeck Expedition

Christian Ludwig Landbeck (1807–1890; also spelled Landbek) was a German ornithologist, active mainly in Württemberg and after 1852 in Chile (Gebhardt 1964). He was accompanied on the expedition by his brother, whose name is unknown to me.

No itinerary of this expedition was published, but data from Landbeck (1843) allowed for the following reconstruction: Ludwig Landbeck (it remains unclear whether his brother was with him all the time, because only Ludwig

published on this expedition and described his own observations, making no further mention of his brother) arrived in Pest in April 1838 and stayed there until mid-July. He continued on 13–14 July downstream the Danube. He lived in Banat and Syrmia at least from 16 July to 18 October, mostly in Jakovo, with visits to Zemun and Kupinovo. On 21 November 1838 he travelled through Hungary homewards. Herman (1891, p. 33) wrote that Petényi accompanied the Landbek brothers on their trip to Banat, but Landbeck (1842a, b, 1843) did not mention Petényi.

The fate of the Landbeck collection is unknown to me. Ornithological observations were published by Landbeck (1842a, b, 1843).

1840: von Loebenstein Expedition

Alexander Robert von Loebenstein (1811–1855; also spelled Löbenstein) was a landlord at Lohsa, Silesia, while Robert Ottomar Tobias (1810–1889) was a taxidermist at Görlitz, Silesia (both these cities lay now in Saxony, Germany). Both were primarily interested in the avifauna of their native Silesia (e.g. Gebhardt 1964). Nevertheless, in 1840, von Loebenstein organized an expedition to Banat, on which he was accompanied by Tobias as hunter and taxidermist. No detailed expedition account was published, but basic data are included in two letters written by Tobias to Eugen Ferdinand von Homeyer (1809–1889), dated in Görlitz on 28 July 1840 and 21 January 1841, respectively (Homeyer 1881, pp. 250–254).

Von Loebenstein und Tobias left Lohsa on 8 April 1840 and traveled via Dresden and Wien (which they left on “Ostertag” = 19 April) to Pest, where they met Petényi (Tobias in Homeyer 1881: 251). It remains unknown what they discussed with him and what Petényi advised them, but their further trip was ornithologically successful, although Petényi did not accompany them.

Both von Loebenstein and Tobias continued from Pest onboard the Franz I. to Zemun, which they reached on “Friday early morning” (Tobias in Homeyer 1881, p. 251), i.e. probably on 24 April. They then sojourned in Jakovo, similarly

as the Landbeck brothers in 1838 (cf. Tobias in Homeyer 1881, p. 251). Later, probably in early June, they continued via Beograd to Banat, where they lived in Opovo (they made first excursion in the vicinity of Opovo on 6 June – Tobias 1847, p. 33). Shortly after they reached Banat, von Loebenstein continued to Băile Herculane, now in Romania, while Tobias stayed in Opovo and subsequently (after 22 June – see Tobias 1847, p. 38) returned from there directly to Jakovo (Tobias in Homeyer 1881, p. 253). Details of the further course of the expedition are unknown, but Tobias was back in Silesia on 28 July 1840, when he wrote a letter to von Homeyer, remarking that von Loebenstein was in Wien at that time (Tobias in Homeyer 1881, p. 250).

Von Loebenstein and Tobias collected large amounts of bird skins and eggs (see Tobias in Homeyer 1881, pp. 250–254), which probably ended to a large degree in their own collections, which are now deposited in Görlitz (SMNG), Dresden (SMND) and Berlin (ZMB) (Herr 1931, Ansorge 1987, Menzel 1991, Roselaar 2003, H. Ansorge in litt. 8 August 2011). Ornithological observations made during the expedition were published by Tobias (1842, 1847, 1848) and von Loebenstein (1851).

1852: Frič Expedition

Antonín Frič (1832–1913; also spelled Fryč or Fritsch) was a Czech zoologist, mainly ornithologist, and curator of zoology at the Bohemian (now: National) Museum in Praha, Bohemia. Although being interested mainly in the Bohemian fauna, he traveled widely (Frič 1900a). His first large expedition led him in 1852 to southern Banat (Frič 1853, 1854, 1900b).

Frič left Praha on 20 March 1852, reaching Pest in the early morning of 21 March. There he unsuccessfully tried to get access to the Museum (Frič 1853: 122) and had thus to continue to Banat without direct advice from Petényi. He left Pest in the night on the same day, traveling by ship southwards to Baziaș, now in Romania, and then on land to Bela Crkva, which he reached on 24 April. Until 24 May, Frič collected

birds in the area between Bela Crkva in the east and Pančevo in the west. Frič started his return way on 24 May in Baziaș, reaching Pest in the morning of 26 May. On that day he was lucky to meet Petényi (Frič 1853: 185). Frič arrived in Praha on 29 May 1852. For a detailed itinerary see Frič (1853, 1854, 1900b).

Frič donated to the NMP 129 bird skins collected during this expedition (Anonymous 1852: 189), but their list has never been published. Ornithological observations made during the expedition were described by Frič (1853, 1854, 1900b).

1853–1855: Zelebor Expeditions

Johann Zelebor (1819–1869) was an Austrian collector and zoologist. He visited Syrmia and Banat three times in spring of 1853, 1854 and 1855 (Pelzeln 1864). He was accompanied on these trips by Josef Ettinger (1822–1908; also Josip Ettinger), an Austrian-Croatian forester and ornithologist (e.g. Ettinger 1857a, b, 1888). I found no evidence that Zelebor was in contact with Petényi.

Zelebor worked at Sremska Mitrovica, Obrež, Kupinovo and Jakovo in Syrmia, and at Kovilj in Central Banat (Pelzeln 1864: 72), but collected mainly at the “Obedska bara” wetlands at Obrež (Ettinger 1857a, 1888). The ornithological results of his expeditions were published by Pelzeln (1864) on the basis of specimens deposited in NHMW; see also Ettinger (1857a, b, 1888).

Discussion

The ornithological explorations of Syrmia and Banat were limited to short-time visits until the mid-1850s, when first ornithologist (Josef Ettinger) settled in the region. Most of these expeditions visited Syrmia and Banat (then in southern Hungary) from 1835–1855, when Petényi acted as a main organizer of ornithological life in Hungary (Brehm 1835, Herman 1891, 1914). Petényi participated in the Naumann Expedition of 1835 and Landbeck Expedition of 1838. Although Petényi’s merits are undisputable, his activities during expeditions were

reported to be controversial (see Leverkühn 1901, pp. 339–340, Finsch 1902). Irrespective of this, Petényi made foreign ornithologists aware of the Hungarian birdlife and effectively started ornithological research in Syrmia and Banat.

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Súhrn

Podávám přehled raných ornitologických expedic do Syrmie a Banátu, které dnes leží na území jižní Vojvodiny v Srbsku, v 19. století však byli málo bezpečnou příhraniční oblastí na pomezí habsburských Uher a Osmanské říše. Prvním, kdo sbíral ptáky na území Syrmie a Banátu byl roku 1809 rakouský sběratel Johann Natterer. Roku 1834 nastoupil Johann Salomon Petényi na místo kurátora zoologických sbírek v Maďarském národním muzeu v Pešti a svojí aktivitou otevřel území tehdejších Uher zahraničním ornitologům. Rovněž situace na území Syrmie a Banátu se v té době uklidnila a začala být pro ornitologické návštěvy příznivější. Ornitologické expedice navštívily Syrmii a Banát v letech 1835 (Naumann), 1838 (Landbeck), 1840 (von Loebenstein), 1852 (Frič) a 1853 – 1855 (Zebebor). V polovině 50-tých let 19. století se v oblasti usadil první ornitolog (Ettinger). Tím skončilo expediční období ornitologických výzkumů Syrmie a Banátu a započala tam éra standardního ornitologického bádání.

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