

Chapter 12

BERLIN: The Zoological Collection of the Stadtmuseum Berlin

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Abstract The zoological collection of the Stadtmuseum Berlin was founded in 1978 as part of the Naturwissenschaftliche Sammlung Berlin by a sponsorship association, the “Fördererkreis der naturwissenschaftlichen Museen Berlins e.V.”. In 1995 the collection was integrated into the newly founded Stadtmuseum Berlin, Landesmuseum für Kultur und Geschichte Berlins.

The small collection mainly contains lifelike mounted specimens of birds and mammals as well as casts of fishes, reptiles and amphibians created for exhibition purposes. There are only few scientific collections, especially of insects.

According to the focus of the Stadtmuseum, the collection is concentrated on the regional reference. Besides specimens living in Berlin in our days, there are also some examples of formerly native species of the region, like the wolf and the brown bear.

Some formerly prominent inhabitants of the Zoological Garden Berlin also belong to the collection, for example, the giant panda Tien Tien, the male hippopotamus Knautschke and the American alligator Swampy.

Keywords Naturwissenschaftliche Sammlung • Stadtmuseum Berlin • Berlin • Fauna of Berlin • Giant panda • Hippopotamus • American alligator

The zoological collection of the Stadtmuseum Berlin concentrates upon regional animals from small insects up to large mammals. Lifelike mounted animals, eggs, nests and feeding traces illustrate the plenty of fauna in Berlin and Brandenburg.

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12.1 History

After the establishment of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the access to the Naturkundemuseum in East Berlin with its comprehensive collections and large exhibition spaces was restricted for the residents of West Berlin. In the west part of the town merely remained the Botanisches Museum and the Botanical as well as the Zoological Garden as publicly accessible natural history institutions. Besides, university collections were available for research and teaching.

To preserve and expand the collections of natural history items existing in West Berlin and in perspective to establish a new Museum of Natural History in the west part of the city, a sponsorship association, the “Fördererkreis der naturwissenschaftlichen Museen Berlins e.V.” was founded in July 1978.

12.2 The Naturwissenschaftliche Sammlung

Financial contributions of the Berlin senate permitted the Fördererkreis to hire six employees: A Biologist, earth scientist, zoological taxidermist, librarian and secretary as well as a depot manager.

In 1989 several rooms in a building provided by the senate were opened to the public near Schloss Charlottenburg. In the so-called Naturwissenschaftliche Sammlung, offices and well-equipped preparation studios were available for zoology and geological purposes also like storage areas and exhibition spaces. The restricted place permitted no attractive permanent exhibition, but special exhibitions on various zoological and geoscientific subjects could be shown. Among others exhibitions were presented on the subject bear (Berliner Wappentier—Bären weltweit), Antarctic (Lebensraum Antarktis), oviparous animals (Rund um das Ei), bees (Bienen—Blüten—Bienenzucht) and ice age (Die Eiszeit in Berlin). Some of these exhibitions were loaned to other museums all over Germany.

Training events for teachers, students and children rounded off the didactic offer of the Naturwissenschaftliche Sammlung.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, there was no more need to build another natural history museum in the city. Nevertheless, the high attendance of the special exhibitions and the educational offering at that time convinced the Berlin senate of the importance of the small Naturwissenschaftliche Sammlung as a natural history education centre.

Therefore it was not closed down yet, but was integrated into the newly founded Stadtmuseum Berlin, Landesmuseum für Kultur und Geschichte Berlins in 1995.

Work continued and several well-frequented special exhibitions were developed, but the additional educational offering for groups at times had to be reduced due to staff shortage.

In 2012 the Naturwissenschaftliche Sammlung was closed down as a publicly accessible museum. The collections were moved and now are stored in the central depot building of the Stadtmuseum.

12.3 The Zoological Collection

From the beginning the zoological collection mainly contained lifelike mounted specimens. Vertebrates were exclusively created for exhibition purposes; scientific preparations did not occur.

However, the Fördererkreis took over several extensive insect collections, among others rose chafers and butterflies. They partly came from private hand, partly from public facilities, in particular the universities who had to separate for spatial reasons from parts of their collections

According to the focus of the Stadtmuseum, a concentration of the collections on the regional reference became necessary. Therefore since 1995 most of the non-European preserved specimens had to be passed to other museums as well as most of the scientific collections.

Today the zoological collection encloses around:

- 450 mounted vertebrates, models and casts
- 70 specimens in alcohol
- 600 bird eggs and nests
- 20,000 insects
- 100 skull preparations

The collection of mounted birds, mammals and casts of fishes, reptiles and amphibians contains beside specimens living in Berlin in our days also some examples of formerly native species of the region, like the wolf and the brown bear.

The Berlin heraldic animal, the bear, is represented in several subspecies. The most precious specimen is the female giant panda Tien Tien (Figs. 12.1 and 12.2). This animal reached Berlin Zoo besides its male companion Bao Bao in 1980 as a



Fig. 12.1 Giant panda Tien Tien, skeleton (with permission from: Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin)

Fig. 12.2 Giant panda Tien Tien, dermoplastic (with permission from: Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin)



gift of the People's Republic of China to German chancellor Helmut Schmidt. Unfortunately, in spite of intensive veterinarian medical efforts, Tien Tien passed away of viral infection in 1984.

A formerly prominent inhabitant of the Zoological Garden Berlin besides Tien Tien also was the male hippopotamus Knautschke (Fig. 12.4), one of only 91 animals which survived the Second World War in Berlin Zoo. Its life-size gypsum sculpture belongs to the zoological collection of the Stadtmuseum Berlin as well as the American alligator Swampy. This reptile, in its younger years, reached post-war Germany as a mascot of the sixth US infantry regiment and was a gift to the Zoo Aquarium in 1952 (Fig. 12.3).

The preserved amphibians, reptiles and snails not only remind of historical museum presentations but are also a document for the occurrence of these species in Berlin 100 years ago. Today most of them are rare or even have become extinct. The majority of the specimens were collected in Berlin at the beginning of the twentieth century.

A permanent loan of the Zoologischer Garten Berlin is the bird's egg collection of Dr Oskar Heinroth (1871–1945). The ornithologist was the founder of ethology and long-standing manager of the Aquarium of the Berlin Zoo. After hand rearing the offspring of most bird species of Germany in cooperation with his first wife Magdalena, he published the outstanding volumes *Die Vögel Mitteleuropas* (Birds of Central Europe) from 1924 to 1934.

Several ancient insect boxes from the first half of the twentieth century show various local types of insects with their stages of development in a reproduced favourite habitat.

Fig. 12.3 American alligator Swampy, dermoplastic (with permission from: Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin)



Fig. 12.4 Male hippopotamus Knautschke, skull (with permission from: Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin)



12.4 The Actual Situation

Since the Naturwissenschaftliche Sammlung was closed down in 2012, special exhibitions on zoological subjects have not taken place any more till today.

In the exhibition area “Frag Deine Stadt!” (Ask your town) of the Märkisches Museum, some species which were found in the region when people first settled at the place of Berlin were shown in a setting. Moreover, the exhibition picked out as a central theme the actual animal life in the river Spree in connection with environmental pollution. This small exhibition area was closed down in 2016 and for the next times, there probably will be no exhibition on zoological subjects in the Stadtmuseum Berlin.

The Märkisches Museum is the permanent exhibition building of the Stadtmuseum Berlin.

Presently the collection is supervised by a zoological taxidermist. A small workroom is available for conservation and restoration purposes.