

# Chapter 7

## ASCHAFFENBURG: The Collection of the Bavarian Royal National Academy of Forestry Aschaffenburg Is on Its Way to Becoming a Modern Museum of Natural History

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**Abstract** The zoological collections of the Museum of Natural Science in the city of Aschaffenburg date back to the Bavarian Royal National Academy of Forestry, which from 1807 to 1910 existed under various names. The permanent exhibition today shows an extensive section of the domestic, but also the exotic bird and mammal fauna. Of special scientific value are the entomological collections, for example, the Singer Collection. With the establishment of Aschaffenburg's Museums Quarter, new opportunities have arisen for a new conception of these natural history collections.

**Keywords** Museum of Natural Science in the city of Aschaffenburg • Bavarian Royal National Academy of Forestry • Singer Collection • Aschaffenburg's Museums Quarter • Spessart • Bavarian Untermain • von Dalberg • News of the Museum of Natural Science of the city of Aschaffenburg (NaMA) and releases of the Museum of Natural Science of the city of Aschaffenburg (MiMA) • Society of Natural Sciences Aschaffenburg • Christian Schad Museum

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The Museum of Natural Science is located in the west wing of Schönborn Court (Museen der Stadt Aschaffenburg, Ines Otschik)

## 7.1 From a Forestry School to a Zoological Collection

Since 1970, the Natural Science Museum of the city of Aschaffenburg has been housed in the centrally located former palace of the Counts of Schönborn of 1681. As one of the seven exhibition sites of the city's museums, this house shows the geological-mineralogical and botanical and zoological collections with regional references to Spessart and the Bavarian Untermain. The zoological collection remains a focal point of the museum holdings that have accumulated for over 200 years.

However, it is precisely the zoological collection that owes its origin less to the intention of displaying animals in a publicly accessible natural history collection, rather to the parallel development of a remarkable educational institution.

In 1807, among other pioneering educational and cultural institutions, the forerunner of what would later become the Royal Academy of Forestry had been established as a simple, private forestry school. This school was approved and promoted by none other than Arch-Chancellor and Prince-Primate Karl Theodor Anton Maria von Dalberg, himself a native resident of Aschaffenburg. As early as 1808, Dalberg elevated the status of the forestry school to that of State Academy, where forestry students from all regions were trained in both practical and scientific aspects of forestry. Among other things named in the Royal Academy's 1820 renewal were the curricula concerning the forest and hunting mammals, the forest and hunting birds, and the "forest insectology," as well as the provision of two halls for establishing the library and the natural history collections (Papius 1820).

During an interruption of the Academy's operation from 1832 to 1844, in addition to all other collections, the collections of birds, bird eggs, mammals, and insects were housed in Würzburg. For the reopening of the Academy in 1844, all the collections were returned and transported back to Aschaffenburg by a river barge via the River Main (Scherg).

Apparently, it was early on when tendencies toward establishing a permanent collection began to develop as one could only infer based on an administrative order given by the incumbent ministry of that time, which admonishes that the high cost of the plethora of mammals and birds was "not to give room to spectator-curiosity, but to procure only that which is required for teaching" (Scherg).

Nevertheless, the zoological collection grew steadily, until the dissolution of the Academy in 1910, and, despite its original purpose, was known far beyond the borders of the city as a public display collection (von Herrlein 1857).

In 1859, for example, collections were publicized as such: "European birds: 550 species in some 1200 specimens . . ." and "Foreign Birds: 320 species in about 400 specimens" and "A collection of European beetles from 5000 species in 10,000 pieces" (Forestry Communications, Volumes 9–10).



The zoological collection today displays specimens not only of domestic but also of exotic birds (Museen der Stadt Aschaffenburg, Ines Otschik)

## 7.2 Achievements of the Aschaffenburg Society of Natural Sciences

Apart from the aforementioned interruption from 1832 to 1844, the Forestry Academy continued its operation under various names in Aschaffenburg, until its relocation to Munich in the year 1910.

At the initiative of individual professors and the Society of Natural Sciences that was founded in 1878, large parts of the natural history collections were kept in Aschaffenburg even after the dissolution of the Forestry Academy.

Founding members of this Society were professors of the Forestry Academy and other scientifically interested personalities of Aschaffenburg, who, in 1911, began presenting the museum collections in the former Academy's building. For many decades thenceforth, members of the Society of Natural Sciences meritoriously volunteered to supervise the municipal museum, enlarged the collections, and tied in with its own publication a series of the publications of the Forest Academy: News of the Museum of Natural Science of the city of Aschaffenburg (NaMA) and releases of the Museum of Natural Science of the city of Aschaffenburg (MiMA). To this day, the Society of Natural Sciences continues these series of publications and looks after the library that has grown through the extensive exchange of publications.

Between 1927 and 1966, Wilhelm Noll, who later became director of municipal operations, took over as the curator and volunteer manager of the museum. Thanks to him that much of the zoological collections could be evacuated during the Second World War and later retrieved. Although significant losses were recorded, in contrast to the completely destroyed collections in neighboring Hanau and Würzburg, the holdings in Aschaffenburg were largely preserved. The entomological collection was practically unscathed. This may well be regarded as a stroke of luck, because, just at this time, the entomological collections proved itself to be of particularly high scientific value within the museum. In the following decades, the zoological holdings grew vigorously once again, mainly through the collecting activities of individual Society members, as well as through purchases and donations. After the war, the glaring lack of space for the museum was only first recognized when the collections were exhibited and stored, beginning in 1970, in the renovated west wing of Schönborn Court. Since then, the permanent zoological exhibition has undergone only minor changes, and almost all innovations in the field of museum conception and design have passed it by (Schmittner 2007). In addition to the resulting impression given to museum visitors of the late 1960s museum presentation style, the nineteenth-century collection cabinets of the Forestry Academy strongly suggest the history of the collections' development.



Till this day visitors are able to relate to the history of the zoological collections (Museen der Stadt Aschaffenburg, Ines Otschik)

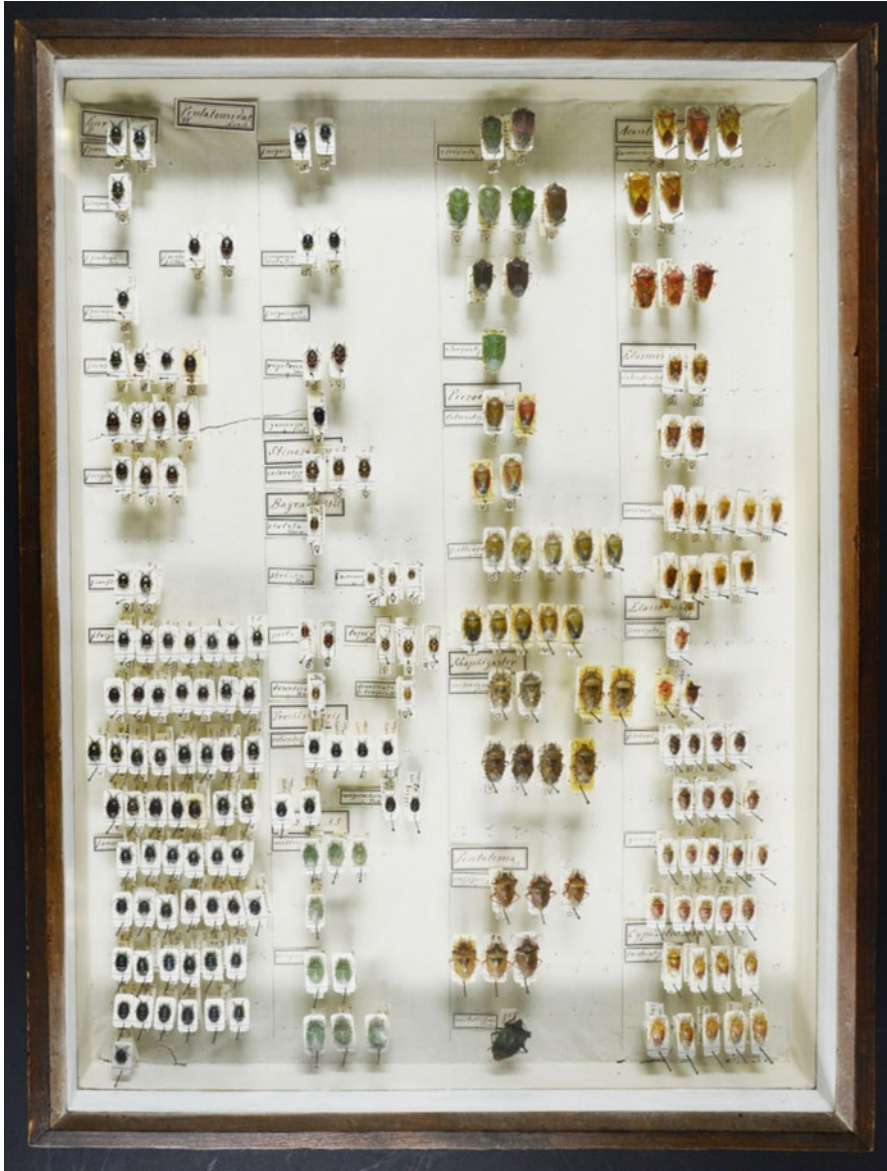
### 7.3 Outstanding Scientific Value of the Entomological Collections

In today's permanent collection, displayed on 250 m<sup>2</sup> of exhibition space, is an extensive cross section of the collections, in particular, not only domestic fauna but also the exotic bird and mammal fauna consisting of mostly historical specimens. Still other specimens can be found in the archive such as the herpetological collection and a collection of fishes with various real-skin preparations, collections of mollusks, and parts of the scientific legacy of Hans Stadler.

An outstanding importance is given to the zoological collection of the Museum of Natural Science due to its entomological collections, constituted by the collections of Singer, Elbert, Fröhlich, and Lepinski. These are the core of academically relevant collections for the Lower Franconia area, the Rhine-Main area, and somewhat beyond.

The Singer Collection includes, among other things, extensive collections of beetles and bugs not only of local relevance but also specimens from Central and Southern Europe and is thus the centerpiece of the total collection, bearing outstanding international importance. The accompanying documents, with their detailed collection data, are essential to the faunal surveys being conducted today (Burmeister 2003).

Part of the entomological collections is still today on display; the majority, however, is kept safely in storage.



The entomological collection of Singer represents a centerpiece of the museum (Museen der Stadt Aschaffenburg, Ines Otschik)

## 7.4 High Potential of the Collections for a Prospective Natural History Museum

It has long been criticized, both by the public and among experts, that the obvious potential of the collections of the Museum of Natural Science is being greatly underused. An appraisal that was conducted by the zoological collections of Munich (Burmeister 2003) as well as the development plan that was drawn up in 2003 for all municipal museums of Aschaffenburg (Museum Development Plan 2003) emphasizes in particular the importance of the zoological collections for exhibition and further scientific evaluations. Among the recommendations were a reexamination, cataloging and reorganization of the collections, conservation measures, and didactic and design revisions of the permanent exhibition.

As a first step, in 2008, the museum's management commissioned employees of Frankfurt's Senckenberg Institute to conduct an inventory of the collections and exhibits.

In collaboration with museum staff, it was possible for the first time in the collections' history to identify all the museum's holdings and enter each into a new database. This resulted in nearly 3000 records for the zoological collection comprising more than 20,000 individual items. Due mainly to the convoluted species accounts in entomology, however, the actual number of preserved individuals is estimated to be about 120,000 (Malten 2009). The comprehensive systematic documentation and research of the history of the collection have been continued since, so that, in the future, every single object is readily available both for science and for the exhibition planning.

Current measures are aimed at the preservation of collections, improving the attractiveness of the Museum of Natural Science and the continued scientific analysis of the holdings. Considerable funds have therefore been invested in recent years in the renovation of buildings, protection against light, and the overall improvement of the infrastructure. Step after small step, the permanent collection now stands ready for being museologically revised.

The Museum of Natural Science has so far had to make do without its own staff, but has been cared for since 2008 by the technical, conservation, and curatorial staff of the city's museums. The collaborations with the Society of Natural Sciences, with Aschaffenburger Führungsnetz, Aschaffenburg's network of museum guides, with the children's group of the LBV (Landesbund für Vogelschutz, a Bird and Nature Conservation Society in Bavaria), and not least with the major museums and research institutions, are all indispensable for the operation and development of the museum and the collections.





Also single specimens like the extinct passenger pigeon illustrate the importance of the collection (Museen der Stadt Aschaffenburg, Ines Otschik)

With the development of Aschaffenburg's Museum Quarter ([www.museen-aschaffenburg.de](http://www.museen-aschaffenburg.de)), great new opportunities have arisen for an entirely new concept of a regional natural history museum. Currently (2015), in the first phase of the Museum Quarter, next to the Art Gallery of the Jesuit Church, the new Christian Schad Museum is being constructed. The archaeological collections, the museum education, museum workshops, and storage facilities are also planned for this central museum campus in Aschaffenburg's upper end. With the construction of a new natural history museum at the site, the zoological collections will both provide a focus and teach vividly about local fauna as well as relate the history of collections.

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