

Book Review

Bloch's fish collection in the Museum für Naturkunde der Humboldt Universität zu Berlin – An illustrated catalog and historical account. By Hans-Joachim Paepke. A. R.G. Gantner Verlag KG, Czech Republic, 1999. 216 pp. + 32 plates. ISBN 3-904144-16-2, hardcover.

This book is a comprehensive study of the fishes in the collections of the great German ichthyologist Marcus Elieser Bloch, now deposited in the Museum für Naturkunde (Humboldt Universität, Berlin; ZMB). It was motivated by the celebration of the 200th anniversary of Bloch's death, in 1999. The aim is to provide useful information on the specimens upon which Bloch based his publications. Such initiatives are welcome, for they provide important historical information that would otherwise be inaccessible to the specialist.

The book is organized into 8 chapters starting with a brief introduction in which the author justifies the need for such a catalog, and compares his effort with other recent publications dealing with Bloch's fishes: Eschmeyer's (1998) 'Catalog of fishes', and Veldhuijzen van Zanten & Isbrücker's (1997) 'Bloch's Fishes Revisited'. The latter was based on illustrations included in Bloch's publications and not from the specimens themselves. Eschmeyer's publication includes much information on Bloch's specimens. However, that study was of a far broader scope, and could not deal with many of the details that only a concentrated effort can do. Paepke's book reviews and corrects information included in Eschmeyer's Catalog and adds data on recently rediscovered material from Bloch's collection.

Chapters 2 and 3 are subdivided into short sections each dealing with a specific topic concerning Bloch's life, work, and general remarks on his fish collection. This is an efficient way to organize the information, and allows the reader to easily locate the relevant information. Those sections make enjoyable reading, offering accurate historical information. Chapter 2 includes four sections: 1) 'Bloch's life'; 2) 'Bloch's cabinet of natural objects'; 3) 'Bloch's ichthyological publications'; and 4) 'The significance of Bloch's scientific work for ichthyology'. The sections included in Chapter 3 are: 1) 'Fate of the collection after Bloch's death'; 2) 'Sources' (about people who provided Bloch with fish specimens from different regions of the world); 3) 'Regions of origin, localities'; 4) 'Repeated descriptions'; 5) 'Unnoticed new species'; 6) 'Preservation techniques'; 7) 'Collection documentation'; 8) 'The present revision of the collection'; 9) 'Numbers of specimens'; and 10) 'Explanation of the catalog'. Sections 8 and 10 provide explanation on the preparation and organization of the book.

Chapter 4 includes the main portion of the book, the catalog of all of Bloch's specimens that have been deposited in ZMB since 1860. It includes approximately 790 specimens

representing 565 species, both originally described by Bloch or not. The order of listing is alphabetical by families, for genera within families and species within genera, following Eschmeyer's (1998) arrangement. Each species is referenced by its name as it appears in Bloch's publications, followed by the specific reference, current taxonomic status, ZMB catalog number, number of specimens, type status, preservation condition, standard length or total length (for types only), locality, reference to relevant illustrations (Chapter 8), and remarks.

The reader should be aware that the format of presentation of the species name in the entry line does not follow Art. 51.2.1 of ICZN. The species name is always followed by Bloch's or Bloch & Schneider's names, whether they are actually authors or subsequent users of the name. In the latter case, the species name should have been distinctly separated from that of the user (by text or some punctuation mark) to allow prompt recognition of non-authorship. Finding that information requires examination of the additional entry line following the name ('current taxonomic status of species'). It would have been more user-friendly if species originally described by Bloch had been highlighted somehow.

Chapter 5 includes a German summary for chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 6 includes the index (Register) organized alphabetically by species name and family names. Species for which figures are provided are indicated with the respective figure number. References are listed in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 includes 32 plates, some with two or three figures. Plates 1-5 include pictures of persons who have collaborated with Bloch either as co-authors (J. G. Schneider) or by providing specimens (C. S. John; J. J. Walbaum), plus reproductions of his handwritten catalog and labels. Those are interesting additions, but are not discussed or cited in text.

Plates 6-30 include a total of 52 photographs of specimens, all types, and provide a direct feel for their overall aspect and preservation condition. The quality of detail is enough to reasonably expect the prints to be a source of taxonomic details not included in original descriptions.

Paepke's book is an important contribution to anyone dealing with Bloch's species. It is a welcome and valuable work to systematic ichthyologists worldwide. The minor problems pointed out above do not detract from the value of book. Contributions such as this should serve as inspiration for similar studies on other important 19th century naturalists' collections.

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