



Jaroslav Boháč's Borneo expedition of 1920 and its ornithological results

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ABSTRACT. During a forgotten expedition to the interior of Borneo, Czech explorers Jaroslav Boháč and Otakar Pekárek observed and collected over 100 birds, most of which are now deposited in the National Museum, Praha (Prague), Czech Republic. Their itinerary is reconstructed and the historical and ornithological significance of their bird collection is discussed.

KEYWORDS. Aves, Borneo, Jaroslav Boháč (1894-1944), collections, National Museum, history

INTRODUCTION

Jaroslav Boháč (1894-1944), native of Mladá Vožice, south-central Bohemia, was a Czech teacher, botanist and later archivist. In the First World War he became a member of the Czechoslovak Legion (Bradley 1991) and with it he crossed Russian Siberia, Chinese Manchuria and the Russian Far East¹. He departed from Vladivostok, Russia, on 12 March 1920 onboard the 18th troop-ship *Sheridan*. The ship reached Singapore on 15 March, where Boháč and his fellow legionary Otakar Pekárek (*1888), native of Lomnice nad Popelkou, northern Bohemia, separated from their troop and went for three months to Borneo, crossing the island from Pontianak through Pegunungan Müller [the Müller Mts. or Müller Range] to Bandjarmasin (see below for a detailed itinerary). The journey was perhaps inspired by Anton Willem Nieuwenhuis's (1864-1953) travelogue *Quer durch Borneo* (Nieuwenhuis 1904, 1907), whose itinerary they followed as far as to Pegunungan Müller and which Boháč (1922) cited several times.

In Borneo, Boháč and Pekárek collected over 100 birds that Boháč donated to the National Museum (NMP), Praha, Czech Republic, in 1921 (Accession number 3470/1921; exact number of specimens was not recorded at receipt). At present I have located 98 skins and mounts, including six too damaged for identification; another four mounts seem to be lost. A few skins were mounted shortly after their receipt, because their photographs were published by Boháč (1922, figs. 49, 50, 105). Most skins were left unidentified in

¹ Another Czech legionary who collected birds during the Siberian campaign was Josef Musílek (1885-1941); see Mlíkovský & Lemberk (2006) and Mlíkovský (2010).

a box, where they were rediscovered in 2008. Boháč and Pekárek were among the first collectors of birds from the interior of the “Dutch” Borneo, but their expedition remained unknown to historians of ornithological research of this island (Junge 1954, Smythies & Davison 1999, Mann 2008). Below I present a brief report on the Boháč expedition to Borneo and on its ornithological results. The ornithological part of this study is based on specimens collected by Boháč and Pekárek and deposited in the NMP (Mlíkovský 2010), and on occasional remarks published by Boháč (1922).

Spelling of toponyms follows NGA (2010) where possible. Current taxonomy follows Dickinson (2003). OEL is an abbreviation of the Old Exhibition Catalogue (*Katalog staré výstavní sbírky, Aves*) of the NMP.

ITINERARY

This itinerary is based on Boháč’s (1922) travelogue. Note that Boháč (1922) gave a detailed description of his travels between Pontianak and Putussibau, and of his sojourn at Putussibau, but his journey across Pegunungan Müller and his further travel to Bandjarmasin were described but briefly, with very few dates given.

Boháč and Pekárek left Singapore on 27 March 1920 onboard the ship *Mercus* for Pontianak, Borneo, which they reached on 29 March. On 1 April they continued up the Kapuas River onboard the steamboat *Irma* via Sanggau (3 April) and Sekadau (4 April), reaching Sintang on 5 April. They departed from Sintang on 8 April onboard the Chinese ship *Tian-Hue* and continued up the Kapuas via Semitau (10 April), Bunut (10 April), and Nangaemaluh (11 April) to Putussibau, which they reached on 11 April.

Putussibau became their base from 11 April to 24 May. During this period they made several excursions up the Sibau, up the Mandai as far as Nangaraun, and to Bukit Tungun (their Tilung). On 30 April to 8 May they made a visit to the foothills of Pegunungan Müller, east of Nanga Era.

On 24 May they left Putussibau following the Kapuas up to Nanga Keriau, where they turned right and continued up the Keriau to Pulauinau (25 May). From there they followed the Bukit and Bungan rivers, crossed Pegunungan Müller and continued via Tamalu (18 June) and Moeradjoeloi to the south-east. They continued down Sungai Barito via Purukcahu, Muaratewe, and Buntok. They reached Bandjarmasin on 3 July and departed from there, leaving Borneo forever, on 6 July 1920.

ORNITHOLOGY

Full list of specimens received from Boháč and deposited in the NMP is given in the Appendix. Most of the birds were probably collected in the wider vicinity of Putussibau, north-eastern Kalimantan Barat, where Boháč and Pekárek worked from 11 April to 24 May. This agrees with the fact that most collected species avoid mountains in Borneo, and that no one is a mountain specialist. However, some specimens were apparently collected later in Pegunungan Muller and along Sungai Barito, eastern Kalimantan Tengah. All specimens lack labels and their exact geographic origin thus cannot be identified,

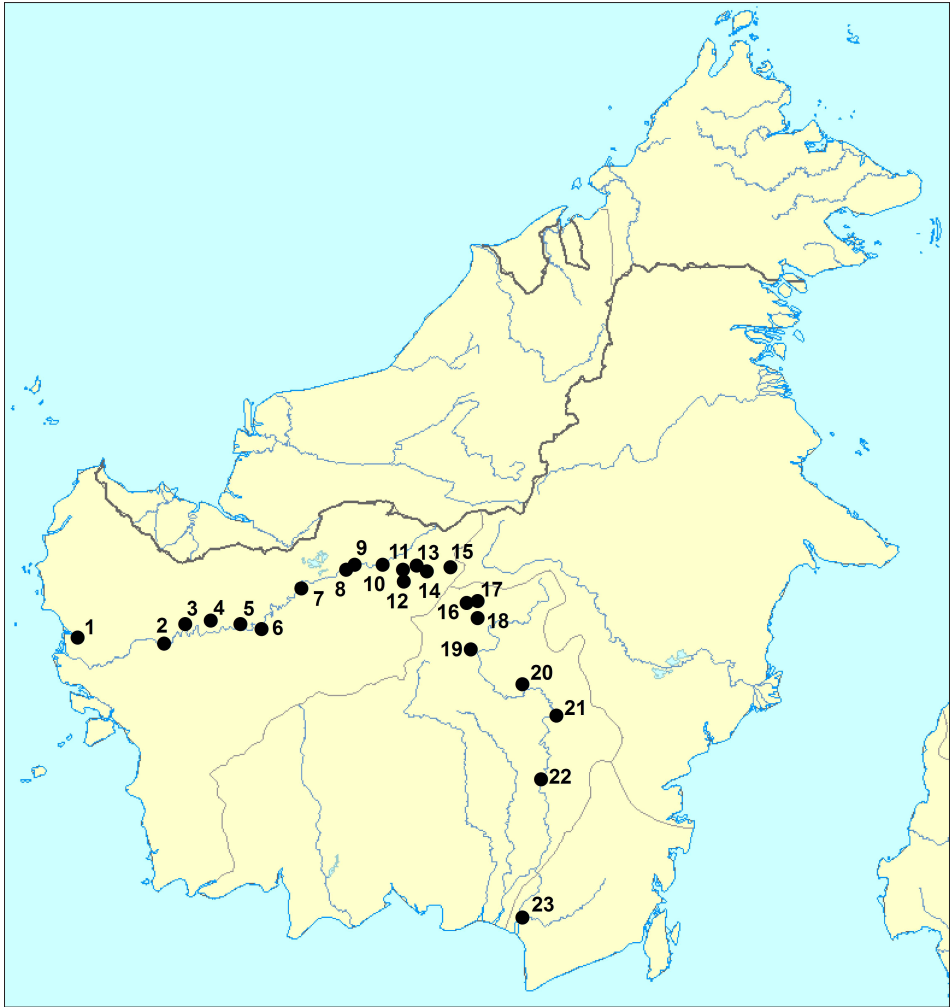


Fig. 1. Itinerary of the Boháč's Borneo expedition of 1920. 1 – Pontianak (0.03°S, 109.33°E), 2 – Mayam (0.1°S, 110.35°E), 3 – Sanggau (0.13°N, 110.60°E), 4 – Sekadau (0.17°N, 110.90°E), 5 – Belitang (0.13°N, 111.25°E), 6 – Sintang (0.07°N, 111.50°E), 7 – Semitau (0.55°N, 111.97°E), 8 – Bunut (0.77°N, 112.5°E), 9 – Nangaemaluh (0.83°N, 112.60°E), 10 – Putussibau (0.83°N, 112.93°E), 11 – Nanga Era (0.77°N, 113.17°E), 12 – Nangaraun (0.63°N, 113.18°E), 13 – Keriau (0.82°N, 113.33°E), 14 – Pulaulinau (0.75°N, 113.45°E), 15 – Sungai Bulit (0.80°N, 113.73°E), 16 – Tamalu (0.38°N, 113.92°E), 17 – Tumbangtuan (0.40°S, 114.05°E), 18 – Moeradjoeloi (0.20°S, 114.05°E), 19 – Sungai Busang (0.17°S, 113.97°E), 20 – Purukcahu (0.58°S, 114.58°E), 21 – Muaratewe (0.95°S, 114.98°N), 22 – Buntok (1.70°S, 114.80°E), 23 – Bandjarmasin (3.33°S, 114.58°E).

unless Boháč (1922) provided additional data. Here I list records of ornithological interest (cf. Smythies & Davison 1999, Mann 2008, Myers 2009).

White-shouldered Ibis *Pseudibis davisoni* (Hume, 1875): Boháč (1922: 159) observed “ibises” in mid May on the Kapuas at Putussibau. Although no description was provided, these were probably White-shouldered Ibises, because all other ibis species are only vagrants to Borneo. White-shouldered Ibises are now absent from this area (Mann 2008, Myers 2009).

Great Egret *Ardea alba* Linné, 1758: Two NMP specimens (P6V-103977 and P6V-103978) from the Boháč expedition represent Great Egrets, but their exact geographic origin is unknown. Nevertheless, they had to be collected in Kalimantan during April to June. This egret is a common non-breeding visitor to Borneo, but its summer records are scarce (Mann 2008, Myers 2009). Boháč (1922: 121, 159) observed dozens of “snow-white herons” on 30 April on the Kapuas between Nanga Era and Putussibau, and unspecified number of “white herons” in mid May on the Kapuas at Putussibau, respectively, but the species identity of these white-colored herons remains unknown.

Black Bittern *Dupetor flavicollis* (Latham, 1790): A “black heron” was held in captivity in a Dayak village on Sungai Mandai (Boháč 1922: 161), and “black herons” were seen on the Kapuas at Putussibau in mid May (Boháč 1922: 159). These were probably Black Bitterns, widespread, though uncommon residents in Borneo (Mann 2008, Myers 2009).

Golden-bellied Gerygone *Gerygone sulphurea* (Wallace, 1864): This species is widespread in Borneo, but its breeding is said to be undescribed here (Mann 2008, Myers 2009). Boháč (1922: 170) found on 18 May 1920 in a forest at Nangaraun a nest hanging on a leaf of a “*Nephrodium*” [= *Nephrolepis*; see Hovenkamp & Miyamoto 2005] fern. It included three tiny eggs. Pekárek collected the nest, eggs and an adult bird, of which the bird and the nest are now deposited in the NMP (P6V-104171a,b), while the eggs were destroyed by native servants in the field (Boháč 1922: 170). The nest is a rather thin construction composed from leaves and grasses. This is thus the first and perhaps the only confirmed breeding record of the Golden-bellied Gerygone in Borneo.

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Appendix 1.

List of bird specimens collected by Boháč and Pekárek in Borneo in 1920.

All specimens are deposited in the collections of the National Museum, Praha, Czech Republic (NMP). For authors and publication dates of species-group names see Dickinson (2003). The number of specimens is given in parentheses; if not stated otherwise, these numbers refer to skins.

- ARDEIDAE: *Ardea alba* (2), *Egretta garzetta nigripes* (1), *Butorides striata* (1)
- CICONIIDAE: *Ciconia stormi* (1)
- ACCIPITRIDAE: *Haliastur indus* (1), *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus* (1)
- FALCONIDAE: *Microhierax fringillarius* (2)
- PHASIANIDAE: *Coturnix chinensis* (1)
- SCOLOPACIDAE: *Actitis hypoleucos* (2)
- COLUMBIDAE: *Treron vernans* (1), *Ducula aenea* (3)
- PSITTACIDAE: *Psittacula longicauda* (1 mount), *Loriculus galgulus* (1 mount)
- CUCULIDAE: *Cacomantis merulinus* (1), *Rhopodytes diardi* (2), *Rhinortha chlorophaeus* (1 skin, 1 mount), *Zanclotomus curvirostris* (4), *Centropus sinensis* (2)
- STRIGIDAE: *Strix leptogrammica* (1)
- HEMIPROCNIDAE: *Hemiprocne comata* (1)
- TROGONIDAE: *Harpactes orrhophaeus* (1)
- ALCEDINIDAE: *Pelargopsis capensis* (2 skins; 1 mount listed in OEC as B.1743 is lost), *Alcedo euryzona* (2)
- MEROPIDAE: *Nyctyornis amictus* (1)

BUCEROTIDAE: *Anthracoceros malayanus* (3), *Berenicornis comatus* (2 skins; 2 mounts figured by Boháč 1922, fig. 105, are lost)

PICIDAE: *Celeus brachyurus* (1 mount), *Picus puniceus* (3), *Blythipicus rubiginosus* (1), *Meiglyptes tukki* (2), *Meiglyptes tristis* (1)

EURLAIMIDAE: *Cymbirhynchus macrorhynchos* (1 skin; 1 mount figured by Boháč 1922, fig. 50, lower left bird)

PITTIDAE: *Pitta sordida* (1 mount)

PYCNONOTIDAE: *Pycnonotus zeylanicus* (3), *Criniger phaeocephalus* (1)

IRENIDAE: *Irena puella* (1 skin; 1 mount)

AEGITHINIDAE: *Aegithina viridissima* (1)

TURDIDAE: *Copsychus saularis musicus* (3 skins; mount listed in OEC as B.1744 is lost), *Copsychus malabaricus* (1 mount)

MUSCICAPIDAE: *Cyornis turcosus* (3)

DICRURIDAE: *Dicrurus paradiseus* (2 mounts, figured by Boháč 1922, fig. 40 left)

ACANTHIZIDAE: *Gerygone sulphurea* (1 skin and nest)

RHIPIDURIDAE: *Rhipidura javanica* (2)

MONARCHIDAE: *Terpsiphone paradisi* (2 skins; 2 mounts)

TIMALIIDAE: *Malacopteron magnum* (1), *Stachyris maculata* (2), *Stachyris erythroptera* (2)

NECTARINIIDAE: *Aethopyga siparaja* (1), *Anthreptes malacensis* (1)

ARTAMIDAE: *Artamus leucorhynchus* (4 skins, 1 mount)

CORVIDAE: *Corvus enca* (1), *Platysmurus leucopterus* (1)

STURNIDAE: *Gracula religiosa* (2)

ESTRILDIDAE: *Lonchura fuscans* (1)