

TAXONOMIST JOSEF PROKOP PRAŽÁK AND HIS RESEARCH OF BIRDS IN WESTERN UKRAINE

To 115th anniversary of death

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Abstract. The Czech ornithologist and taxonomist Josef Prokop Pražák (1870–1904) had a share in the research of birds in Western Ukraine, now Ukrainian Republic. His great work on the birds of Eastern Galicia was however questioned. Pražák labeled an ornithologist and finished his scientific activity. But the reasons could have been different in distinct personal relationships and scientific competition and rivalry. Sources, which could be evidence of fraud or other explanations, as well as Pražák's collection, library and papers are missing, no one has consistently sought after them. The text is a memory of Pražák's personality.

Key words: history, study of birds, Galicia.

Таксономіст Йозеф Прокоп Пражак і його дослідження птахів Західної України. До 115-річчя з дня смерті. - Й.Й. Худечек. - Беркут. 28 (1-2). 2019. - Чеський орнітолог і таксономіст Й.П. Пражак (1870–1904) зробив свій внесок у вивчення птахів Східної Галичини, проте оцінка його доробку багатьма науковцями була негативною. Пражака звинувачували у фальсифікації даних і шахрайстві. Але причиною цього могли бути й особисті стосунки між ученими, конкуренція та суперництво. Джерел, які могли б підтвердити чи спростувати твердження про шахрайство, нема. Не збереглися й колекція, бібліотека та рукописи Пражака.

Ключові слова: історія, вивчення птахів, Галичина.

Josef Prokop Pražák

Doctor of Science, Josef Prokop Pražák, was born on June 22, 1870, in Hoříněves, estate number 16, in Bohemia, now Czech Republic. His father was a landlord and councilor. As a journalist and grain trader, Pražák died July 14, 1904, on an estate there, on tuberculosis at the age of 34. Buried July 17, at the local cemetery (the Memorial grave number 285, grave tenant Jiří J. Hudeček, Kleinschmidt, 1905; Hudeček, 2014a, 2014b). Date of death July 15, is incorrect, also given the Christian name Prokuslav (Gebhardt, 1964; Hudec, 1999; Mlíkovský, 2011, 2012).

Present evaluations of Pražák's life are only served unilaterally by his opponents, without looking from the other side only distorted. He is unlikely to have graduated from expensive and expensive studies, which he took most of his short life (only 34 years), even abroad (the last in Scotland, University of Edinburgh) to act as a conscious cheater. Some attacks against Pražák carry features of insults to honor (e.g. accusations of kleptomania, mental inferiority and paralitics). The reason for the removal of Pražák was his moral free features (Anonymus, 1904). Maybe, scientist's conflicting insistent nature was the cause of his opinion contradictions with V. von Tschusi, possibly also with O. Kleinschmidt since 1893, even before «the Galician case» (von Tschusi, 1895, 1897; Pražák, 1896; Kleinschmidt, 1905, 1909; Kelm, 1960), as the personal disagreements with L. von Lorenz.

Pražák worked as volunteer in the Vienna museum. We know about this time of his life almost nothing. For these briefly explained reasons the evaluation of Pražák's life and scientific work can not be definitively closed. Pražák as taxonomist described several subspecies of birds and mammals, some descriptions are valid (Bowling, Ruvinsky, 2000; Parkin, Knox, 2010; Mlíkovský, 2011; Hudeček, 2016). The endemic Scottish Crested Tit (*Lophophanes cristatus scoticus*) was described in the following remarks in Galician work (Pražák, 1897a: 347; McGowan et al., 2003). Pražák (1897b) wrote the

history of ornithology in Bohemia. Participated in the great work of Central European birds at the end of 19th century (Pražák, 1900).

Pražák's Eastern Galician Birds

L. von Lorenz (1898, 1899, 1901) and other (Kafka, 1899; von Tschusi 1899a, 1899b; Jourdain, 1934) were looking for evidence of Pražák's alleged fraud. Pražák's (1897a, 1898) collection in historical Eastern Galicia, now Ukraine and Poland, especially in the vicinity of Lviv (49° 50' 27'' N, 24° 01' 43'' E) and Sambir (49° 31' 5'' N, 23° 11' 51'' E) between 1890 and 1896, according to von Lorenz, had to reach 8 551 bird skins, 303 nests and 17 252 eggs (see Reiser, 1899); and possibly even exceeded the state of the collections in the Imperial Royal Natural History Court Museum in Vienna (von Lorenz, 1892). Pražák's research was truly «colossal» based on modern methods of collecting birds for taxonomic purposes (in balgs) and processing in the form of hides, it was not a classic, cabinet museum work. L. von Lorenz, on the basis of borrowed Pražák's privat correspondence, actually proved that Pražák was not in certain terms in Galicia. On numerous queries on forest and estate management, actually proved that Pražák at certain times in Galicia was not. He questioned the existence of Pražák's collectors J. Klemra and W. Zadorozni, and his military assistants; Pražák joined the crew in Lviv. Pražák was accused of scientific deception, his date marked as impossible and worthy to be deleted. The fate of his supposedly large Pražák's private collection of Palearctic birds remained unknown (Kelm, 1960).

By the end of his life Pražák acted as an agricultural journalist and on the political side. His former friend, K. Kněžourek, in his two-volume work «Great Nature of Birds», some Pražák's data, including data from Galicia, questioned or totally ceased consistently (Kněžourek, 1910). It is a pity that in time and space (at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries) Pražák's historical data on the breeding of



rare bird species was not investigated (currently Gorban et al., 2015). This was probably because of the lack of knowledge of the observers. The extent of Pražák's determination knowledge and literature was high and the determination of birds to species was correct. Handwritten notewriter has remained absent; it is unlikely he could not exist. The review of Pražák's Galician works damaged his scientific reputation and led to the definitive termination of his work. It is therefore difficult to discuss its outcomes and its stands. However, most of the Pražák species of birds reported were later verified in the territory of historical Galicia, now Western Ukraine and Poland (Grishchenko, 2004; Stawarczyk et al., 2017). Pražák's breeding data were not unfortunately verified shortly after his research. Pražák could capture changes in the breeding area and migration of some species, and it is highly probable that he is not fictitious. This can be documented on several examples: the Levant Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter brevipes*), Long-legged Buzzard (*Buteo rufinus*), Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*), White-tailed Lapwing (*Vanellus leucurus*), Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*), Calandra Lark (*Melanocorypha calandra*), Short-tailed Lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla*) and Yellow-breasted Bunting (*Emberiza aureola*). Dunajewski (1934) had the Pražák's data on rare Trush's reservations but did not rule out his migration. The Kněžourek (1910) has completely ignored it.

Conclusion

Josef Prokop Pražák was accused of fraud on the basis of his work on birds in Eastern Galicia less than a year after his doctorate in Scotland. The circumstances of his case have never been thoroughly investigated. There was no evidence of his alleged mental illness, nor his collection of birds and papers sought. This text does not defend the Pražák, it is intended for the reader and his own judgment Josef Prokop Pražák to the history of bird research in Western Ukraine and deserves memories.

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