



CONSERVATION AND PREPARING OF BIRDS (Aves) IN THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF MONTENEGRO

Branka Tomović, Dubravka Bešić, Alen Tatar

The Natural History Museum of Montenegro, Trg Vojvode Bećir Bega Osmanagića 16, P.O. Box 374, 81 000 Podgorica, Crna Gora (Montenegro). E-mail: prmuzej@t-com.me

Key words:
collection of birds,
preparing,
Natural History
Museum of
Montenegro.

SYNOPSIS

The collection of birds in the Natural History Museum of Montenegro was created from the Natural Collection that belonged to the Institute for the Protection of Nature. Presently it contains about 250 exhibits among which are Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus* BRUCH, 1832), Great Spotted Cuckoo (*Clamator glandarius* LINNAEUS, 1758), West African Ostrich (*Struthio camellus* LINNAEUS, 1758), Long-eared owl (*Asio otus* LINNAEUS, 1758), Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea* LINNAEUS, 1758), Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis* LINNAEUS, 1758), and many other species.

This work shows the method of preparing and conserving of birds used in the Natural History Museum of Montenegro.

INTRODUCTION

One of the basic activities of natural museums is collecting plant and animal material, its preservation and showing it to their public (throughout constant or occasional exhibitions). The botanical material is conserved in herbariums. The animals are prepared and conserved so that they keep their natural appearance. The process of conservation includes skin and bones. Conservation is done by arsenic, formaldehyde and lately alcohol. The conservation of the skin is necessary in order to avoid the damage of the exhibits caused mainly by insects (moth *Nepticula complanella*, museum beetle *Anthrenus museorum* L.), molds, or dust (Alinger, 1948). If conservation were omitted, cracking of the skin as well as hair and feather loss would occur in a very short time interval. The exhibit which is not too damaged can be restored. The Natural History Museum of Montenegro has in its possession about 300 prepared animals, most of which are birds.

THE METHOD OF PREPARING BIRDS

At the beginning of preparing we have to decide whether we are making a scientific preparation or an exhibit (Tomić, 1967). We make a scientific preparation when the bird is so damaged that it can not be made into an exhibit of natural appearance, but has to be preserved because of its scientific value (rare, endangered or species protected by the law). The procedure is the same as when making an exhibit, but we do not make a model (the bird is in a prone position with its wings down). Scientific preparations are kept wrapped in newspaper, and are not shown on exhibitions (Alinger, 1948).

The process of preparing a bird can be divided into three stages:

1. Peeling the skin and removing the flesh,
2. Cleaning and conserving the skin,
3. Installing the artificial body and fitting.

Previously the following measures are taken:

- Total length,
- The length of the right wing,
- The length of the left wing,
- The length of the tail,
- The length of the mouthpiece,
- The length of the beak,
- The length from the nostril to the point of the beak.
-

The mouth, anus and any wounds are closed with cotton wool. Dirty feathers are washed with water and dried. Then an incision is made starting from the middle of the chest to below the anus.

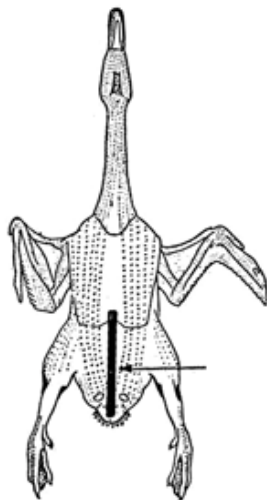


Figure 1: The first incision

The first stage of preparation consists of peeling the skin and removing the flesh, fat and other soft tissue from the head, wings, neck and tail. After the cleaning we coat the skull and bones of the wings and legs, as well as the skin with arsenic.

We fill the skull with clay (loam) and fit the artificial eyes. Afterwards we choose the wire of suitable diameter which has to be soft and flexible, but strong enough to shape into a natural position of head and torso. We make a hole at the occiput of the skull and insert one end of the wire which was previously threaded through the skin of the neck. The other end of the wire is stretched to the tail. Two wires are fitted through each wing and leg. All wires are connected and as a result we have the metal skeleton of the bird.

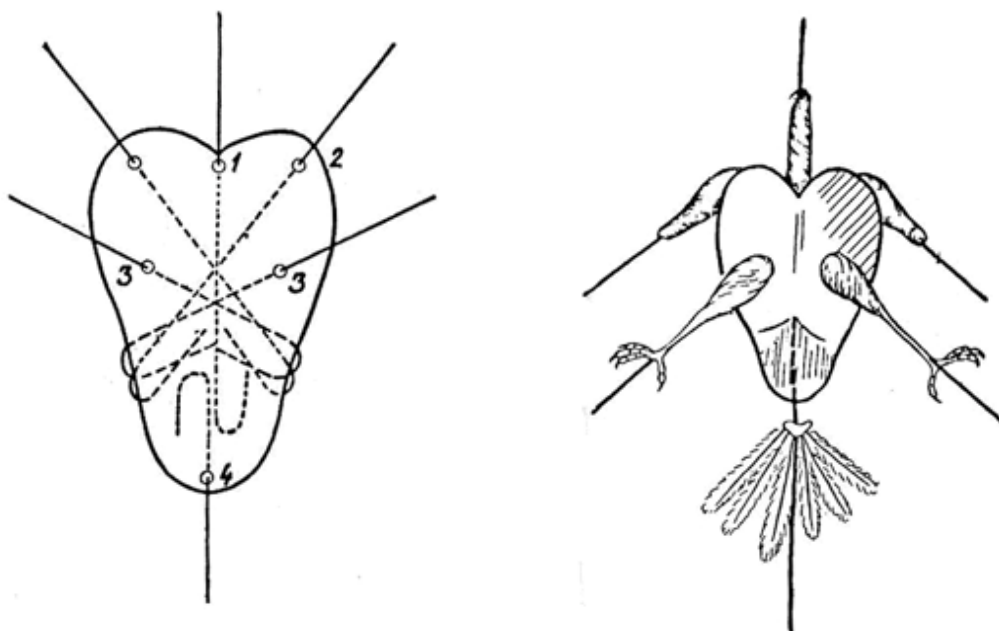


Figure 2: The metal skeleton

Around the metal skeleton we put cotton wool thus filling any gaps until we achieve the natural plumpness of the body. In order to make the crop we insert cotton wool through the beak.



Figure 3: The bird filled with cotton wool.

Sewing of the skin of the bird is done by hand, using needle and thread. After sewing, we place the bird in desired position and assort the feathers by hand. We use pincers to pull the eye lids onto the eye. Previously cut pieces of cardboard are used to fasten the wings and tail and the bird is left to dry for several days.

Bird prepared in such manner is a dermoplastic preparation prepared by Alinger method (1948).

REFERENCES:

- Alinger, P. (1948): Preparation and Conservation of Animals, Zagreb. 1-260.
Tomić, V. (1967): Zoopreparator's Handbook, The Natural History Museum, Belgrade 1-58.

Received: 14. May 2009.