

Amongst the several books I had identified, there was one that I had not: *Traité du Rossignol* [A Treatise on Nightingales] by an anonymous author and dated 1707. My colleague had bought it for me on spec, in the hope that I'd be interested. Written in old French I couldn't read it. But by luck I had a student who could. The more she translated the more intrigued I became. The nightingale was the ultimate songster and hence the most popular cage bird for centuries and here was a handbook for nightingale catchers and keepers.

Searching far and wide it soon became clear that *Traité du Rossignol* was not well known and had not previously been examined by an ornithologist. In part this must have been because no-one suspected that bird catchers – always socially unacceptable - had anything to contribute to ornithological knowledge. This one was different. Contrary to all expectations the book proved to be mine of early information on nightingale ecology and behaviour. Most significantly, the anonymous author warns would-be nightingale keepers that their birds will appear 'sick' and agitated twice a year, once in autumn and once in spring. But he says, treat them gently and they'll get over it, this is nothing more than thwarted migratory behaviour. Today this behaviour is well known, and referred to as migratory restlessness or 'Zughunruhe' – so-called because it was assumed to have been first identified – almost a century later - by a German bird keeper. However, as far as I can tell the anonymous and perceptive French author of *Traité du Rossignol* was the first notice and correctly interpreted this behaviour. This is significant: in the 1700s most bird lovers assumed that small birds like nightingales and swallows spent the winter in the mud at

the bottom of ponds. Even though I had to rely on someone else to read it for me *Traité du Rossignol* has been among my best books.

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## News & Information

### 24. The Alfred Russel Wallace Correspondence Project Begins

Alfred Russel Wallace OM, LLD, DCL, FRS, FLS (1823-1913) was one of the 19th century's most remarkable polymaths.

Not only was he the co-discoverer with Charles Darwin of evolution by natural selection, but he made many other notable contributions to science; not just to biology, but also to fields such as glaciology, anthropology, epidemiology, and astrobiology.



Wallace in c. 1869 by Thomas Sims. © G. W. Beccaloni.

His pioneering work on evolutionary biogeography led to him becoming regarded as the 'father' of that discipline, and Wallace's Line, the boundary he proposed between the faunas of the Oriental and Australasian regions, is even familiar to non-specialists. Beyond this, Wallace was one of the most highly regarded collectors and field biologists of tropical regions in the 19th century and his book *The Malay Archipelago* is one of the most celebrated travel writings of that century and has never been out of print.

Wallace was also a vocal supporter of a variety of controversial non-scientific subjects, such as spiritualism, socialism, land reform, and women's rights, but

this didn't turn the scientific community against him as some have supposed. Instead he received some of Science's most prestigious honours and awards, including: the Darwin-Wallace and Linnean Gold Medals of the Linnean Society of London; the Copley, Darwin and Royal Medals of the Royal Society; and the Order of Merit (which is awarded by the ruling monarch as the highest civilian honour of Great Britain). Historian of Science Sherrie Lyons, recently remarked that "...Wallace has to be one of the most interesting people in the history of science." (Lyons, 2011) - a sentiment shared by many who have studied his life and work.

Research on Wallace (mine included) is unfortunately often hampered by the difficulty of obtaining copies of his surviving letters, since (perhaps surprisingly) no serious attempt has ever been made to compile and publish them. Approximately 5,000 letters to and from Wallace are known, but these are scattered amongst the libraries of c. 100 institutions in several countries and no catalogue of them has been published. In 2009, a colleague Judith Magee (NHM Library), and I decided to try to remedy this situation by seeking funds to set-up the Wallace Correspondence Project (WCP) at the Natural History Museum, London, and in July 2010 we secured a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation of £200,730 over a three year period, to fund phase 1 of the project. This phase aims to locate, catalogue, and summarise Wallace's letters and make the information available free of charge via an easy to use website. Phase 2, which will be more costly, will focus on producing scholarly annotated transcripts of the letters, plus a number of 'popular' and academic publications such as a Calendar of Correspondence.

Work on the WCP officially began in

October 2010 and achievements of the first year include: producing a comprehensive list of all known Wallace letters; creation of a website for the project (<http://wallaceletters.info>); construction of a sophisticated relational database for use in cataloguing the letters; cataloguing the 1270 letters plus 1369 associated items (such as enclosures and envelopes) held by the NHM and producing digital scans of these; and successfully negotiating with a number of other repositories for scans of the letters they hold. In April 2011 an article about the WCP was published online by the BBC (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-13009952>) and in July Sir David Attenborough kindly agreed to become the patron of the project.

2013 is the 100th anniversary of Wallace's death and a variety of events, including books, exhibitions, and TV programmes are being planned by individuals and organisations around the world to mark the occasion. Partly by design and partly by happenstance, phase 1 of the WCP is due to be completed towards the end of that year.

Please note that the WCP is always on the lookout for letters we do not know about e.g. ones in private collections. If you know of any then we would be very grateful if you could contact us. We are also looking for dedicated volunteers who have an Internet connection and considerable experience of transcribing, editing and summarising the text of Victorian letters. Volunteers will be credited for their work by having their name recorded as the transcriber/editor/summariser of any letters they work on in the project's database, which will be made available online in a few months time. If you would like to volunteer please contact the WCP Archivist Caroline Catchpole ([c.catchpole@nhm.ac.uk](mailto:c.catchpole@nhm.ac.uk)) and let her

know what experience you have.”

Reference: Lyons, S. 2011. Review: Natural Selection & Beyond: The Intellectual Legacy of Alfred Russel Wallace. *Reports of the National Center for Science Education*, 31.5: 7.1 - 7.3 (available online at <http://www.reports.ncse.com/index.php/rncse/article/viewFile/66/57>)

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### **25. RHS Lindley Library, London, closed**

Following a fire, the RHS Lindley Library, London, is currently closed to visitors. All historical and art collections are safe but the RHS are organising for research material to be cleaned by specialists, some of which is being moved offsite for this to take place. Currently none of London's collection material is accessible, and it is likely to be some months before it is business as normal. For more information visit the RHS website. [www.rhs.org.uk/About-Us/RHS-Lindley-Library/Visiting-the-library](http://www.rhs.org.uk/About-Us/RHS-Lindley-Library/Visiting-the-library).

## **Notes & Queries**

### **26. In search of Catesby**

For a census of surviving copies of Mark Catesby's *Natural history of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands* (London, 1731-1743), I am seeking out institutional and privately owned copies anywhere in the world.

I have examined 70 copies - and know of a number more - in the U.S., U.K., Ireland, and Sweden, based largely on listings in OCLC, COPAC, and other online catalogues and through personal contacts. I have discovered many differences between copies - inevitable

for a work that was published in parts over a period of 20 years - and am documenting the printing and distribution of the work from this physical evidence.

I will be most grateful to hear from any library or owner of the work, especially those that are not cataloged in the major databases. Don't worry about whether I already know of or have seen yours - I will sort that out. I intend to publish the census, but of course, private owners are assured of the strictest confidentiality. Many thanks.

Ms. Leslie K. Overstreet

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### **27. Who was the sponge specialist in Göttingen in the 1860s?**

In an 1870 letter to Ferdinand Krauss at the Stuttgart Royal Museum, Ferdinand von Mueller wrote:

“I have filled up the gaps in the case with sponges; the monographer at the Museum in Göttingen will probably be able to name them, as he worked on my sponges in poor Keferstein's time”.

Wilhem Moritz Keferstein died earlier in 1870, and had worked on other material supplied by Mueller. Who was the ‘monographer’?

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### **28. Zoological specimens sent by Ferdinand (von) Mueller**

I am currently completing a study of the zoological activities of Ferdinand von Mueller, Government Botanist of Victoria from 1853 until his death in 1896. Among these activities was an