



NatSCA

Natural Sciences Collections Association

<http://www.natsca.org>

NatSCA News

Title: Book Review: The Echalaz Bird Collection by Adrian Sailor

Author(s): Waterhouse, David M.

Source: Waterhouse, David M. (2008). Book Review: The Echalaz Bird Collection by Adrian Sailor. *NatSCA News, Issue 14*, 57.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/196>

NatSCA supports open access publication as part of its mission is to promote and support natural science collections. NatSCA uses the Creative Commons Attribution License (CCAL) <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/> for all works we publish. Under CCAL authors retain ownership of the copyright for their article, but authors allow anyone to download, reuse, reprint, modify, distribute, and/or copy articles in NatSCA publications, so long as the original authors and source are cited.

Book Review

The Echalaz Bird Collection by Adrian Sailor. 76pp, 98 colour images, 23 halftones. Published by MPM Publishing, Ascot, 2007. ISBN – 978-09545596-7-0 Available from MPM, West Mains, London Road, Ascot, Berkshire, SL5 7DG price £28 plus £3.50 p&p.

Two reviewers kindly looked at this book. Here are their thoughts:

This is a small hardcover colour book, focusing on the taxidermy collection of Lieutenant Colonel Charles Theodore Echalaz (1844-1913). The author's own description of this book, pretty much sums it up: "This new book is a photographic record of the condition of the cases in 2007 with a brief description of the contents, condition, taxidermist and also where many of the birds were acquired".

After the short preface follows a biography of Charles Echalaz himself. Echalaz turns out to be a fascinating chap; a man very much of the Victorian era in which he lived. Plagued with ill health during his army career, Echalaz filled his spare time with hunting and shooting trips in India and the British Isles. It is the results of his British (and Irish) trips that make up the main subject of this book. Another point to make about Echalaz is that - unlike many Victorian museum benefactors - Echalaz did not simply leave his collection to a museum after his death. The Colonel was present at Waterloo Museum in Liverpool for the opening ceremony, and even gave a speech. (cont.)

However, this was just the beginning of the story for Echalaz's collections. During WWII - after a near miss on the Waterloo Museum by a Luftwaffe bomb - the collection was moved to Stockport Museum. In the mid 1960s it was moved back to just a few miles north of its original home in Waterloo, albeit to the Department of Health in Crosby! In 1967 it found its way to Crosby Library where a purpose built room was created for it called (unsurprisingly) the 'Echalaz Room'. After neglect, vandalism and burglary during the 1980s the Echalaz collection was finally moved into storage, where it still resides today. And, what of the Echalaz room in Crosby Library? - well, it is now a computer room, incongruously still bearing the Echalaz name above the door!

After a more detailed look at the taxidermists involved in making Echalaz's collection, the author moves on to descriptions of the cases themselves. The pictures are of the cases as they are today with a few reproductions of the original pictures in Echalaz's guide (unfortunately many of the recent photographs are at different angles from the originals, due to the constraints of council basement photography). The note-like text in this chapter is brief and clinical, e.g. "Glass intact, tape deteriorating. Painted backdrop sea and cliff scene, clean." Despite being a rather tedious part of the book (essentially a catalogue), this section could be useful to curators when starting to try to match a name to unsigned taxidermy cases in their own collections.

Apart from maybe a little more editing needed in the previously described 'Cases' section, my major criticism of this book (strangely enough) is the page numbers. Instead of plain old 1, 2, 3..., the decision was made to include a tiny vignette of Echalaz's face above the number on every single page. The whole idea is so reminiscent of Terry Gilliam's early animations, that on flicking through the pages I half expected Echalaz's mouth to open and close before a large foot to fall on his head! Otherwise, this is a perfectly presentable little book. If nothing else, it is worthy of publication as a record of this much-neglected collection. The interesting story of Echalaz's life is well researched, the history of his collection is a sobering reminder of the difficulties faced in order to house and maintain large natural history collections, and the pictures and descriptions are an important reference when researching taxidermy artists.

All in all, I think this book would be a welcome edition to any taxidermy enthusiast or natural history curator's bookshelf. It will certainly sit rather happily within the taxidermy section of our natural history library here in Norwich.

David M. Waterhouse

Assistant Curator of Natural History, Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service