

METALEPTEA

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE



ORTHOPTERISTS' SOCIETY

President's Message

By **ALEXANDRE V. LATCHININSKY**

President

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Dear Fellow Orthopterists,

The autumn starts, which means that the preparations for the 13th International Congress of Orthopterology are going at full speed. I would like to take a moment and provide some important reminders. Please note that all the information regarding the Congress can be found at its website at ico2019morocco.com. Besides the scientific program, details of accommodations and fees, there is a wealth of touristic information including the description of a breath-taking post-Congress tour.

First and foremost, the deadline for submitting your abstracts is just around the corner. Don't forget to submit them to orthoptera2019@uiz.ac.ma by 31st of October using the template that can be found at "Call of Contributions" at the Congress website. If you want to apply for an Orthopterists' Society Travel Grant to attend the Congress, you should do so by sending your application electronically by 31st of October directly to davidmhunter100@gmail.com. The application should include an estimate of travel costs plus a copy of the abstract that you have already submitted by 31st of October deadline. The Travel Grants are mainly, but not exclusively, for students or young professionals (aged 35 years or less). Hurry up - Society travel funds are limited!



Furthermore, I would like to remind that at the Congress several prestigious OS awards will find their recipients. In particular, the 2019 Ted Cohn Award for Excellence as a Young Professional Orthopterist, 2019 DCF Rents Award for Lifetime Dedication to Orthopterology, and 2019 Sir Boris Uvarov Award in Applied Orthopterology. Details about each award and the nomination requirements can be found at the Congress website in the "Awards and Grants" section. The deadline for these three award nominations is the 31st of January, 2019 and they should be sent electronically to davidmhunter100@gmail.com. Travel grants and society awards became possible thanks to the generous gift of the Orthopterists' Society's late President, Ted Cohn.

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2018: 200th birthday and rebirth of the Museu Nacional

By **PEDRO G.B. SOUZA-DIAS**

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This should be a different text. I would say that I got the position of professor at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro), researcher and curator of the Museu Nacional (National Museum), and that, for the first time, the biggest collection of Orthoptera in Brazil would have a curator specialist in Orthoptera. It would be a celebration text.

However, the tragedy of September 2nd forced me to change it. It is with deep sadness and perplexity that I will try to tell a little about the Museu Nacional and what we lost that day. I don't intend to discuss the big economic, political, and moral crisis in Brazil; the chronic and historical lack of investment in education and science; or the great difficulty in insisting on making science in Brazil. Although it is a sad text, I intend to talk about our Museum, hope and reconstruction.

Museu Nacional, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro

The Museu Nacional is under the administration of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (MNRJ). It is the oldest scientific institution in Brazil, and the biggest national history museum in Latin America, with a collection of more than 20 million artifacts and specimens (Fig. 1).

Its history is closely related to the history of Brazil. The main building, the Palácio de São Cristóvão (São Cristóvão Palace), was the residence of the Portuguese Royal Family when the entire Portugal royal court moved to Brazil running from the Napoleonic troops, in 1808. After Brazil's independence, it continued to be the

residence of the Brazilian Imperial Family, until 1889, when the republic was proclaimed. In that Palace lived four Portuguese monarchs (D. Maria I, D. João VI, D. Pedro IV, and D. Maria II) and two Brazilian emperors (D. Pedro I and D. Pedro II), and their families, including Princess Isabel, daughter of D. Pedro II, known for signing the abolition of slavery in 1888. Moreover, it was in that Palace that Princess Leopoldina (first wife of D. Pedro I, daughter of the Austrian emperor Francis II) signed an independence decree of Brazil from Portugal in September 2nd 1822 (days later, in September 7, D. Pedro I officially declared Brazil free from Portugal), and where Brazil's first Constitution was written during the Republican Constituent Assembly (1889-1891, just after the Proclamation of Republic and banishment of the imperial family).

The MNRJ completed 200 years of existence in 2018. The escape of the Portuguese court to Brazil in 1808 was a crucial moment to the country's history because it started a period of great transformations, in which Brazil ceased to be a Portuguese colony and Rio de Janeiro became the capital of the Reino Unido de Portugal, Brasil e Algarves (United Kingdom of Portu-



Figure 1. São Cristóvão Palace, Museu Nacional, before the fire. Photo: Museu Nacional.

gal, Brazil, and Algarves). During that period the first main national institutions were created, as were banks, courts, government and administration buildings, press, libraries, schools and universities. Brazil was also destination of artists, teachers, scientists, doctors, lawyers, and several professionals that were hired to raise the new country, as the French Artistic Mission in 1816. In that period, the so-called Museu Real (Royal Museum) was founded in June 6, 1818

With the Republic proclamation in 1889, the Museu Nacional moved to the Palácio de São Cristóvão (São Cristóvão Palace) in 1892, where it still stands today. The history of the Museum is also closely related to scientific development in Brazil, and received the visit of some famous foreign scientists, like Albert Einstein

and Marie Curie. Moreover, the Museum graduated thousands of scientists in several fields of knowledge throughout history and is one of the most important institutions for Brazilian science and education. Currently, it runs six Graduation Programs: Archaeology, Botany, Geosciences, Linguistics and Indigenous Languages, Social Anthropology, and Zoology.

Therefore, the tragedy that destroyed the Palace represents not only a scientific loss, but the loss of part of the memory and history of Brazil. The Palace housed the exhibition, administration offices, departments, and the main scientific collections, involving 90 main researchers and a community of hundreds of people, among them researchers, technicians, and students.

The Museu Nacional houses (or housed):

- The biggest collection of Egyptian artifacts in Latin America, including mummies, sarcophagi, statues, and stone carvings.
- An impressive ethnographic collection, with more than 42,000 artifacts from Rome, Pompei, Greece, Africa, Asia, and Oceania; and artifacts, mummies and skeletons of pre-Colombian people and Brazilian indigenous tribes, some of them now extinct.
- An unparalleled linguistic collection, with unique records of extinct indigenous tribes.
- The most important Social Anthropology Library in Brazil.
- Thousands of pieces and artifacts from Portuguese and Brazilian courts, such as the throne of D. João VI, king of Portugal.
- Thousands of historical documents.
- Important geological collections, including a collection of meteorites.
- Massive paleontological collections, with fossils and skeletons of dinosaurs (including the complete skeleton of *Maxakalisaurus topai*, the largest Brazilian

dinosaur) pterosaurs, Pleistocene megafauna, insects, plants, and invertebrates.

- Unique archaeological and anthropological collections, including the oldest human remains found in the Americas, the 12,000 year-old-skeleton named Luzia.
- Collections of Carcinology, Arachnology, and Malacology, among other invertebrates.
- One of the main entomological collections in Brazil, with more than 5 million specimens.
- Thousands of scientific projects, in all levels and in several fields of knowledge.
- One of the main herbariums in the country.
- A large central library, with more than 15,000 rare pieces.
- Large and historical herpetological, ichthyological, ornithological, and mammology collections.

The fire burned down the entire Palace, including the exhibition, administration and department offices, three entire departments (including all the laboratories and facilities), and the main collections (Fig. 2). The only things not destroyed were the vertebrate and some invertebrate collections, the central library, and the herbarium.

Until now, few things were removed from the Palace. Almost all the types of the Carcinology and Malacology collections were saved in the beginning of the fire. Considering the proportion and magnitude of the fire we can't exactly quantify

yet what was lost and what can be restored. It will take several weeks for the work of search and rescue of the collections among the debris. The searches will be conducted by the researchers, followed by a team of archaeologists. Sadly, the MNRJ is now an archeological site. Another point is that the area of the MNRJ is isolated and several experts from governmental agencies are investigating the tragedy.

The Entomology Department

The Entomology Department has 11 professors, one emeritus professor, 7 technicians, dozens of students (graduate and undergraduate), and postdoctoral researchers. Except two laboratories of Diptera and part of their collection (families Muscidae and Cecidomyiidae), the entire department, including the laboratories, research facilities, and the collections, were consumed by the fire.

The Department was located on the 3rd floor, which collapsed due to the intensity of the fire. The large compactor, which stored a large part of the collection, is now on the 2nd floor and is severely damaged. Although it is premature to consider the loss of the entire collection since we have not yet accessed the area, it is unlikely that anything should remain in the debris.



Figure 2. São Cristóvão Palace, Museu Nacional, after the fire. The highlighted area was the Entomology Department (3rd floor). Photo: Reuters.



Figure 3. Logo of the Orthoptera Laboratory.

We were hit by an unprecedented catastrophe, and we are living the worst nightmare for a scientist. Our collection, with more than 5 million specimens and more than 2,200 types, is certainly lost. We have no words to express the magnitude of this tragedy. Some articles related our losses with the loss of the Library of Alexandria, but the truth is that for us this is incomparable. We never passed through anything like this. We are facing a massive loss of types, and if we consider the types of other collections (like Arachnology, Paleontology, etc.), this is probably the biggest loss of types in a single event in recent history. We are devastated.

The Orthoptera Collection

A few weeks ago, our emeritus professor, Professor Miguel Monné, published the list of the orthopteran types of MNRJ. He presented the types of 273 species: Acrididae (171), Eumastacidae (5), Proscopiidae (13), and Romaleidae (84). The Orthoptera collection had approximately 24,000 mounted specimens (14,200 Acrididae, 600 Romaleidae, 350 Omexechidae, 345 Proscopiidae, 295 Pyrgomorphidae, 65 Pamphagidae, 60 Eumastacidae), and more than 10,000 specimens in cotton beds. This was the biggest Orthoptera collection in Brazil.

The Orthoptera collection also has an interesting history, which is closely related to the emergence of

orthopterology in Brazil. As said by Dr. Monné (2018): “the history of the Orthoptera collection (...) began with a visit to Brazil of the orthopterist Marius Descamps (...) for a trip to collect and study grasshoppers in the state of Minas Gerais. This was the first contact that urged Dr. Carlos Alberto Campos Seabra and myself to initiate intensive collecting trips, mainly in the Amazon, and later in central, southern and eastern Brazil. The collection surged in volume with the donations of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia and from the Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle, Paris. Posteriorly, the collection received the visit of Dr. Carlos S. Carbonell, who described many species, with Ricardo Rondros, Marius Descamps, Christiane Amédégnato, and H. R. Roberts. The largest donation received by the Museu Nacional was the collection of Carlos Alberto Campos Seabra, who collected Orthoptera for more than 10 years. The contributions of naturalists that collected for Campos Seabra are extremely important. Here I mention the most active ones: Olmiro Antonio Roppa, Bento Silva, Francisco M. Oliveira, M.V. Cerdeira, E.S. Lima and A. Peixoto”.

Thus, it is a very important and unique collection, from a historical and scientific point of view. Its loss is irreparable.

Future

The images of that day are vivid in our minds, and it will certainly never leave our memory. We passed through deep sadness to anger, and these feelings will disappear, but the emptiness sensation is something that we may never lose. Our

Museum is gone and this is irreversible. But, above all, a museum is made of people, and we are still here. We are ready to rebuild the Museum. The dust is settling down and we are working hard, despite grief and pain. Our main activity now is to support the students, write proposals, and try to get funding for the new department, field works, and collection.

My first official day of work was September 3rd, just one day after the tragedy and Biologists Day in Brazil. My first day was, literally, a beginning for me and the Museum. I’m still a researcher of MNRJ, head of the Orthoptera Laboratory (Fig. 3) and curator of the collection, although I don’t have a collection anymore (for a while). Assuming a position in MNRJ is the greatest achievement of my life and I’m extremely proud! The Orthoptera Lab is working! In a few weeks we will travel for field work and start a new collection for the next generations. My mission is to rebuild the collection, an opportunity to effectively contribute to the orthopterology in Brazil and the rebirth of the MNRJ (Fig. 4).

We are still here. And we will resist. The Museu Nacional lives!

P.S. I want to express my gratitude for the many messages of support I’ve received. Each support is very important for us, and is good to know that we are not alone. Thank you very much!



Figure 4. #museunacionalvive. Photo: Museu Nacional