

A FAMOUS COLLECTION OF BEETLES COMES TO THE MUSEUM

By CHRISTINE TARDY

A LITTLE BEFORE the turn of this century, a public official in Austria took up a hobby. Several decades later the results of his hobby had grown into a major systematic collection of such importance to science that they were moved in their entirety across the ocean to Chicago Natural History Museum.

Dr. Max Bernhauer collected beetles. His legal and government duties as a *Notar*

names of the beetles, with two of them devoted to the Staphylinidae alone.

Dr. Bernhauer gave us knowledge of at least 4,900 new species, and his collection included approximately 100,000 beetles—a staggering number for one man to have collected in his lifetime. His collection is of special value to entomology because it contains type specimens of thousands of species. After an animal has been described for the first time, that description serves as a means of identification for all other animals like it, and the originally described specimen becomes a "type." Many descriptions are too incomplete for other zoologists to be certain about which species is referred to, so being able to study the original "type" specimens helps clear up the difficulties. The Bernhauer collection contains not only the types of most of the species that Bernhauer himself described, but many types of species described by other authors as well.

Scientific investigation, aimed at enriching the world's knowledge of itself, goes on in many places. Universities, museums, government bureaus, institutes for special purposes, and lately, even big industries, have all contributed. For a long time many museums served primarily as the resting places of collections begun by private individuals, institutions, or expeditions. Now these collections are being put to work by museums in a broader way. No longer are exhibition collections simply accumulated behind glass to be observed as natural curiosities. Museums have large staffs of research scientists behind the scenes who make extensive use of collections such as the beetles recently acquired by Chicago Natural History Museum.

Where Dr. Bernhauer left off, the Museum takes over. Its scientists carefully study the specimens he collected and gradually build up a fuller understanding of this realm of nature. This is one of the important functions of a modern museum—to preserve such collections and to continue learning from them, and particularly to make them available to scientists of other institutions who previously had no access to them.

The Bernhauer collection of beetles happened to be of particular interest to this Museum. One of the Museum's research associates in insects, Dr. Charles H. Seevers, is an authority on the family Staphylinidae. Access to this collection enables him to examine certain Old World forms which had been known to him only as names, and several of the studies he is making will be amplified by study of the Bernhauer collection. Thus the collection was put to use as soon as the Museum received it.

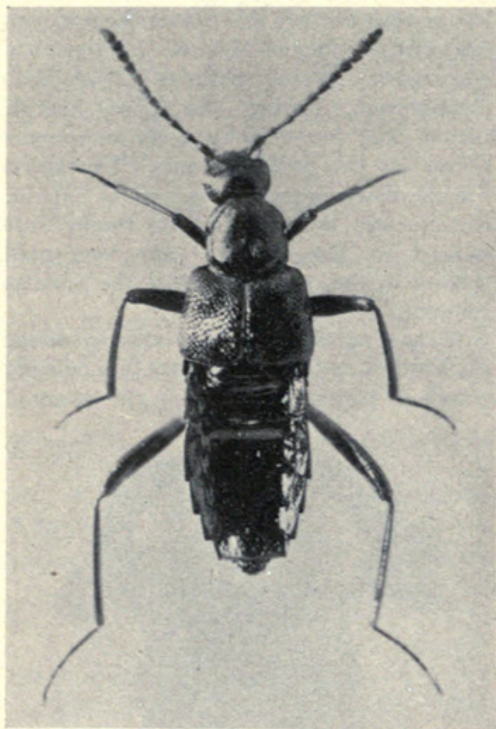
Although acquiring a collection is sometimes a very simple matter (collectors frequently have given their collections to museums), occasionally the purchase of a

large collection may be a very complicated transaction. In this case, post-war European economic conditions cast some of the aspects of an international diplomatic mission over the acquisition of the Bernhauer beetles.

When Dr. Bernhauer died just after the war, his valuable library and collection went to his daughter, Dr. Ilse Himmel. She wanted to dispose of the collection where it would be useful to science, so she engaged an agent to help her. It was through her agent, Dr. Johannes Vondrak, that Chicago Natural History Museum first learned the collection was to be sold. After preliminary negotiations, the Museum arranged for Rupert L. Wenzel, Curator of Insects, who was about to go to Europe to study beetles in various museums, to supervise the conclusion of the transaction.

Things got off to a bad start for Mr. Wenzel even before he left the country. When he was ready to board ship in New York, the longshoremen's strike was in full swing and it looked as though it might take weeks to get passage to Europe. At the last moment he was able to go because his ship, which was to carry a group of diplomats who had to get to Europe fast, was permitted to sail despite the strike. But Mr. Wenzel's luggage was left behind on the dock. He arrived in Europe in the middle of winter without any woolen underwear—a major tragedy to one's comfort in the unheated buildings of fuel-short European cities.

Except for this mishap, which proved to be a rather persistently disconcerting factor,



A TYPICAL ROVE BEETLE

The picture of this particular species of the family Staphylinidae is enlarged approximately eight times life size. Other species range from a twenty-fifth of an inch to an inch and a half in length.

in Vienna had nothing to do with entomology, so his study of beetles was purely an avocation. However, Dr. Bernhauer didn't collect beetles the way people collect stamps, and he didn't keep them as pets. It happens that the world contains so many kinds of beetles their classification is not even nearly completed. These tiny creatures—the group known as Coleoptera—represent the largest order of insects on earth, and it will be a long, long time before science is acquainted with all of them.

Dr. Bernhauer was interested in doing what he could to contribute to the world's knowledge of this one phase of nature. He studied the specimens of a family called Staphylinidae (rove beetles) and published his first paper about them in 1898. After that, his writing was prolific and at the time of his death in 1946 he had published reports on some 290 separate studies. These included contributions to the monumental catalogues of the *Catalogus Coleopterorum*—a shelf-full of 30 huge books listing only the

STAPHYLINID BEETLES INCLUDE ODD KINDS

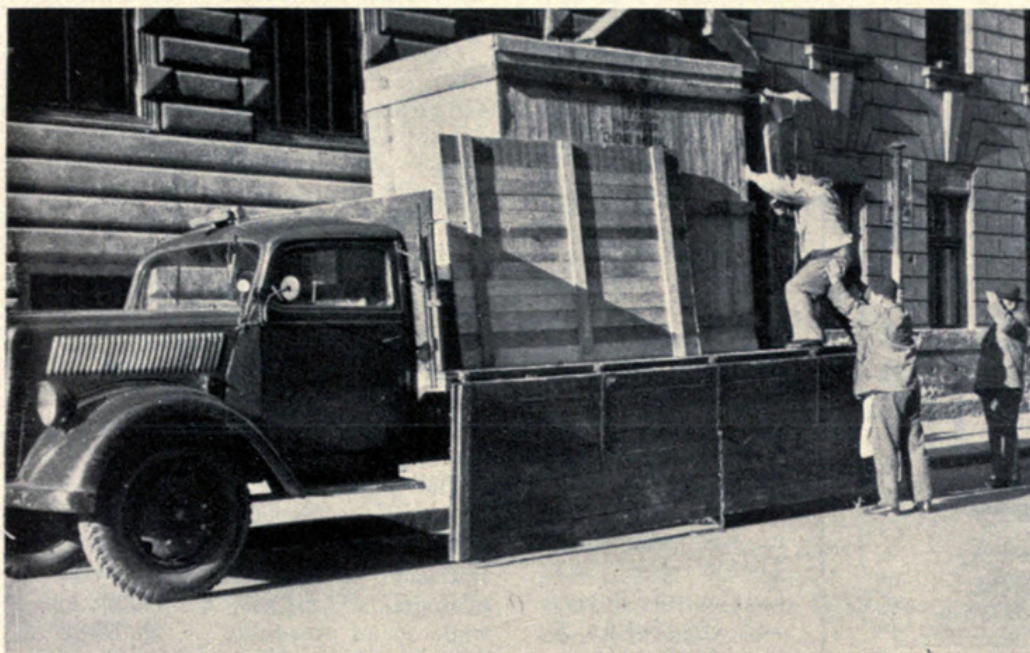
The Staphylinidae or rove beetles are chiefly slender forms with short wing covers (see illustration) that range in length from one twenty-fifth of an inch to an inch and a half. Most species live in decaying animal or vegetable matter and there feed upon other insects. Some of the most remarkable insects known are the rove beetles that live with ants or termites; these include certain species that resemble the host ant or termite so closely that only an expert can distinguish between them. The family name, Staphylinidae, is derived from a Greek root that means merely "a kind of insect."

This information is supplied by Rupert L. Wenzel, the Museum's Curator of Insects. The accompanying article tells of his experiences in Europe on a successful mission to obtain the huge and scientifically important Bernhauer collection of beetles for this Museum.

it appeared as though everything would go along smoothly once Mr. Wenzel arrived in Austria. He was met at the Vienna airport by Dr. Himmel and Dr. Vondrak, and shortly afterward he met Dr. Josef Eiselt

cover the entire purchase. Requests for revised permits are often viewed with raised eyebrows, so getting a new one was another time-consuming matter.

While these complicated negotiations



A TON AND A QUARTER OF BEETLES LEAVES VIENNA

Huge crate containing the important Bernhauer collection is loaded on truck for shipment to seaport on way to Chicago. It was the largest single box of insects ever received in this city, but the size of the collections contained is only a small part of their significance to entomologists.

of the University of Vienna and the Naturhistorisches Museum, who had agreed to assist with packing and shipping the collection. Dr. Vondrak had decided the collection belonged in an American museum. He felt it would be safer than in a European museum, because of the recent ravages of war and the insecurity which has prevailed ever since. Further, Dr. Vondrak seemed motivated by a mystical faith in the future of America.

All Europe, of course, is in the throes of post-war recovery, with concomitant upset economic stomachs. In attempting to cope with the situation, which has left Austria in a particularly insecure spot, rigorous controls over the economy have been established. For this reason, getting the Bernhauer collection out of Austria became a complicated business.

PROCEDURAL TANGLES

It was necessary to obtain a government permit that would allow the collection to leave Austria for America. Such permits are issued with caution because the fluttering economic situation has caused individuals to try for black market exchange rates. In order to stabilize the situation, everything must be cleared through the Austrian National Bank. Further, it had to be shown that no one was trying to evade government regulations. Unfortunately the permit when obtained had failed to include the Bernhauer library, so it was now necessary to seek a revised permit to

were going on, Rupert Wenzel's nerves were taking an awful beating. On top of everything else, the packing had required the greatest care. The beetles were pinned in wooden boxes with glass tops. Each beetle (thousands!) had to be secured, and the larger ones protected with additional pin-guards, a pin on either side to keep each safely in place. So, Mr. Wenzel and Dr. Eiselt taped their fingers heavily and pinned—and pinned and pinned! After the pinning, layers of cardboard and cotton were placed over the specimens in each box, between them and the glass. As an additional safeguard against the possibility of damage from broken glass, the glass of each box was completely covered with adhesive tape. It took nearly three weeks to get the boxes of specimens ready to be crated.

'ALLES IST VERBOTEN'

The day after the collection had been paid for according to form, and the time for crating the individual boxes arrived, customs officials gathered to supervise the packing. When Mr. Wenzel walked in the door, one of the officials stated bluntly, "Alles ist Verboten!" After all Mr. Wenzel, Dr. Himmel, and Dr. Vondrak had gone through to have everything in perfect order, it was declared "verboten." It seemed that the National Bank permit was not enough—another permit was required from the Foreign Export Commission. So frantic phoning and hailing of taxicabs ensued.

When all the arrangements had been made

FREE MOVIES FOR CHILDREN ON SATURDAY MORNINGS

The Spring Series of free motion-picture programs for children presented on Saturday mornings by the Raymond Foundation will continue each Saturday during April. Four more programs, each to start at 10:30 A.M., will be presented in the James Simpson Theatre of the Museum.

Children may come alone, accompanied by adults, or in groups from schools or other assemblage points. No tickets are needed.

Following is an outline of the programs:

April 5—SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

The struggle for life by animals and plants
Talk by Peter Koch

April 12—HUDSON BAY ADVENTURE

Indians, fox-trappers, and animals
Talk by C. J. Albrecht

April 19—VOICE OF THE PRIBILOFS

Where the huge seal-herds gather
Also a cartoon

April 26—SIMBA

Story of an African lion hunt photographed by Martin Johnson
Talk by Harriet Smith

and it looked as though the shipment would be allowed to leave the country, it was decided to crate all the individual boxes together, making a package so heavy and large that it would require a crane to handle it. That way, it couldn't be thrown around as easily as smaller crates might, and the danger of loss by theft was eliminated. The man who supervised the final crating was the same one who handled the crating of the Viennese art treasures for their American tour, for this job required an equal degree of delicacy. When it was all done, the crate weighed more than a ton and a quarter and measured six by seven by eight feet.

This by no means finished the job. A special railway car was needed to handle the crate on its way out of Austria, through Germany to the port of Rotterdam. From there, a crane loaded it aboard ship and five weeks later, after a delay at the American port of debarkation, it arrived in Chicago.

Now that the Museum has the Bernhauer collection, which turned out to be so much trouble to acquire, the Museum scientists have months of difficult work ahead of them. The new collection will be integrated with the Museum's other beetle collections, and a bibliography will be made of the Bernhauer papers, of which a nearly complete file is now available.

The acquisition of the Bernhauer collection was unusually complicated, but it is an example of some of the problems worked out behind the scenes, with which most Museum visitors are unfamiliar.



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