



## Birds collected during the Herdemerten's 1938 Expedition to western Greenland

Jiří Mlíkovský

Department of Zoology, National Museum, Václavské náměstí 68, CZ-115 79 Praha 1, Czech Republic;  
e-mail: jiri\_mlikovsky@nm.cz

**Abstract.** The National Museum at Prague possesses 45 skins of birds collected during the Herdemerten's Expedition to western Greenland in summer 1938, including those of Gyrfalcons caught for the purposes of falconry. These skins provide an additional insight into this less known expedition.

**Key words.** Aves, Greeland, historical ornithology, Kurt Herdemerten, Hans-Robert Knoespel.

### INTRODUCTION

In 1938, the Hermann-Göring-Stiftung [= Hermann Göring Foundation] sent a two-man expedition to Greenland, one of whose main goals was to obtain Gyrfalcons (*Falco rusticolus*) for the Reichsjägerhof [= Reich Hunting Lodge] near Braunschweig, Germany. The expedition was organized under the auspices of Hermann Göring (1893-1946), a Nazi leader and avid falconer (Bewley 1956, Bein 2000, Neumärker & Knopf 2007), but apparently had no political context (Barr 2012). The expedition was led by Kurt Herdemerten (1900-1952), a mining engineer, and its member was Hans-Robert Knoespel (1915-1944), an ornithologist and falconer (Guspietsch 1945, Blyth 1951, Klüh 1998). Details were described by Barr (2012); see also Herdemerten (1939).

The expedition sailed from Copenhagen, Denmark, on board the Danish ship *Gertrud Rask* on 20 May 1938 and reached Egedesminde in western Greenland on 5 June. From there the expedition continued on 23 May on board the motorboat *Ane-Marie* to Godhavn, southern Disko Island. While Herdemerten traveled widely, Knoespel stayed in a camp east of Godhavn until 31 July. Both Herdemerten and Knoespel then moved northwards. There, Knoespel stayed on various places just north of the Nugsuaq Halvø from 9 August to 25 September, while Herdemerten, as previously, traveled more widely. In the days bridging September and October Herdemerten and Knoespel separately moved southwards to Egedesminde, where they rejoined. On 9 October they continued from Egedesminde onboard *Hans Egede* to Copenhagen, which they reached on 27 October 1938. See Barr (2012) for more details.

It is known that the Herdemerten's Expedition brought back to Germany five Gyrfalcons (Barr 2012) and that Knoespele made various ornithological observations during his stay in western Greenland (Barr 2012 and unpublished Knoespele's notebooks and manuscripts deposited in the archives of the Department of Zoology, National Museum, Prague). However, it remained unknown that the Herdemerten's Expedition collected bird specimens for museum purposes. I discovered 45 specimens (all skins) from the Herdemerten's Expedition in the collections of the Department of Zoology, National Museum, Prague (NMP). The NMP presumably obtained these specimens, along with Knoespele's notebooks and manuscripts, after the World War II from the Goldhöhe Station, Krkonoše Mountains, Czechia. This station (called "Zlaté návrší" in Czech) belonged to Czechoslovak border guards until the WW II and, on an unknown date, but before Knoespele returned from his 1938 Expedition, was obtained by the Hermann-Göring-Stiftung, which founded there a falconry to which all Gyrfalcons from the Herdemerten's Expedition were forwarded and where Knoespele became employed. Since the end of 1942, Goldhöhe became also a training station for the staff of German arctic weather stations (Selinger 2001).

Below I give a list of bird specimens that originated from the Herdemerten's 1938 Expedition to western Greenland. The localities mentioned below are as follows: Aasiaat (formerly Egedesminde), 68.71°N, 52.87°W; Drygalski Halvø, 70.53°N, 51.00°W; Ilulissat (formerly Jakobshavn), 69.22°N, 51.10°W; Mudderbugten, ca. 69.70°N, 52.00°W; Qaanaaq (formerly Thule), 77.47°N, 69.23°W; Qeqertarsuaq (formerly Godhavn), 69.25°N, 53.53°W; Ritenbenk, Appat Island, 70.92°N, 51.95°W; Salliaruseq Island (formerly Storøen), 70.69°N, 51.83°W; Scoresby Sound, eastern Greenland, 70.50°N, 25.00°W; Sisimiut (formerly Holsteinborg), 66.94°N, 53.67°W; Ummannaq Fjord, 70.95°N, 53.00°W. I use toponyms valid in Knoespele's times throughout this paper.

For the authorship of scientific bird names see Dickinson (2003).

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

*Fulmarus glacialis* (1 specimen): Godhavn, mid-July 1938 (P6V-108418).

*Phalacrocorax carbo* (1 specimen): Godhavn, mid-July 1938 (P6V-108424).

*Somateria mollissima* (1 specimen): ad. ♂, Godhavn, early July 1938 (P6V-108422).

*Somateria spectabilis* (1 specimen): ad. ♂, Egedesminde, early October 1938 (P6V-108423).

*Falco rusticolus* (7 specimens): (1) Drygalski Halvø, caught on 13 April 1938, died in captivity on 24 March 1939 (P6V-109142); (2) ♀, caught as a juvenile in 1937 at Egedesminde, purchased by Herdemerten's Expedition in 1938, died in captivity on 3 September 1939 (P6V-108455); (3) juv. ♂, shot at Jakobshavn on 3 October 1938 (P6V-108456); (4) juv. ♂, caught at Thule (presumably in 1938), purchased by Herdemerten's Expedition in 1938, died in autumn 1938 (P6V-108457); (5) no data; died in captivity (P6V-108458); (6) juv., taken from a nest at Ritenbenk in 1938 (P6V-108459); (7) Godhavn, no date (P6V-108460; two wings only).

REMARKS: Specimens of unknown origin are listed here for the sake of completeness, but they may have been caught in 1937 on Iceland (cf. Brüll 1938).

*Falco peregrinus* (2 specimens): (1) juv. ♀, west-central Greenland, 1938 (P6V-108452); (2) ad. ♀, shot at the nest at Storøen on 18 August 1938 (P6V-108453).

*Lagopus mutus* (2 specimens): (1) ad., Storøen, late August 1938 (P6V-108430); (2) ad., Drygalski Halvø, early August 1938 (P6V-108431).

*Numenius phaeopus* (1 specimen): Storøen, 24 September 1938 (P6V-108421).

*Arenaria interpres* (2 specimens): (1) Drygalski Halvø, August 1938 (P6V-1017423); (2) Drygalski Halvø, mid-August 1938 (P6V-108436).

*Calidris maritima* (2 specimens): (1) collected in the Davis Strait at the latitude of Holsteinborg, i.e. at 67°N, in October 1938 (P6V-101744); (2) Godhavn, July 1938 (P6V-101745).

*Phalaropus lobatus* (1 specimen): Mudderbugten, 31 July 1937 (P6V-101741).

*Stercorarius pomarinus* (1 specimen): Godhavn, early July 1938 (P6V-108428).

*Stercorarius parasiticus* (1 specimen): Godhavn, early July 1938 (P6V-108426).

*Larus hyperboreus* (2 specimens): (1) juv., Storøen, mid-August 1938 (P6V-108467); (2) ad., Drygalski Halvø, early August 1938 (P6V-108468).

*Larus glaucoides* (2 specimens): (1) juv., Storøen, mid-August 1938 (P6V-108469); (2) ad., Drygalski Halvø, early August 1938 (P6V-1078470).

*Rissa tridactyla* (3 specimens): (1) Scoresby Sund, June 1938 (P6V-101652); (2) juv., Storøen, late August 1938 (P6V-108461); (3) ad., Storøen, early August 1938 (P6V-108462).

*Sterna paradisaea* (1 specimen): Uummannaq Fjord, early August 1938 (P6V-109143).

*Uria lomvia* (1 specimen): ad., Uummannaq Fjord, early August 1938 (P6V-108444).

*Alca torda* (1 specimen): ad., Uummannaq Fjord, early August 1938 (P6V-108440).

*Cephus grylle* (6 specimens): (1) ad., Drygalski Halvø, early August 1938 (P6V-108441); (2) ad., Drygalski Halvø, early August 1938 (P6V-108442); (3) ad., Storøen, late August 1938 (P6V-108443); (4-6) all juv., Storøen, late August 1938 (P6V-108445, 108446, 108447).

*Nyctea scandiaca* (1 specimen): western Greenland, no date (P6V-108454).

*Oenanthe oenanthe* (1 specimen): juv., Storøen, early September 1938 (P6V-104256).

*Corvus corax* (4 specimens): (1-3) all Storøen, August 1938 (P6V-108448, 108449, 108450); (4) Drygalski Halvø, July 1938 (P6V-108451; two wings only).

## DISCUSSION

All bird species collected by the Herdemerten's Expedition in 1938 are known from western Greenland (Bertelsen 1921, Salomonsen 1950, Boertmann 1994); no rarities were collected. Despite this, the Herdemerten's Expedition of 1938 is a significant and until recently overlooked (but see Barr 2012) contribution to the ornithology of Greenland (cf. Boertmann 2006).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The preparation of this paper was supported by project the project NAKI (DF-12P01OVV021) of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic. I thank William Barr (University of Calgary, Canada) for a preprint of his Herdemerten paper.

## REFERENCES

- Barr W., 2012: Gyrfalcons to Germany: Herdemerten's expedition to west Greenland, 1938. – *Polar Record* 48: 113-122.
- Bein R., 2000: *Zeitzeichen: Stadt und Land Braunschweig 1930-1945*. – Braunschweig: Döring, 288 pp.
- Bertelsen A., 1921: Fuglene i Umanaq Distrikt [Birds in the Umanaq District]. – *Meddeelser om Grønland* 62: 139-214. [In Danish.]
- Bewley C.H., 1956: Hermann Göring. – Göttingen: Göttinger Verlagsanstalt, 346 pp.
- Blyth J.D.M., 1951: German meteorological activities in the Arctic, 1940-45. – *Polar Record* 6: 185-226.
- Boertmann D., 1994: A [sic] annotated checklist to the birds of Greenland. – *Meddelelser om Grønland* 38: 1-65.
- Boertmann D., 2006: Grønland: fra Fabricius og Winge til Salomonsen og mange flere [Greenland: from Fabricius and Winge to Salomonsen and many more]. – *Dansk Ornitologisk Forenings Tidsskrift* 100: 254-264. [In Danish.]
- Brüll H., 1938: Ergebnisse der Islandexpedition der Hermann Göring-Stiftung 1937. – *Deutsche Falkenorden* 1938 (3): 22-41.
- Dickinson E.C., ed., 2003: *The Howard and Moore Complete checklist of the birds of the world*. 3rd rev. ed. – London: Christopher Helm, 1039 pp.
- Guspietsch T., 1945: Hans-Robert Knoespel zum Gedächtnis. – *Polarforschung* 15: 25-27.
- Herdemerten K., 1939: *Jakunguaq. Das Grönlandbuch der Hermann-Göring-Stiftung*. – Braunschweig: Georg Westermann, 136 pp.
- Klüh P.N., 1998 [1997]: Hans Robert Knoespel. – *Greifvögel und Falknerei* 1997: 10-19.
- Neumärker U. & Knopf V., 2007: *Görings Revier: Jagd und Politik in der Rominter Heide*. – Berlin: Links, 236 pp.
- Salomonsen F., 1950: *Grønlands fugle – The birds of Greenland*. – København: Ejnar Munksgaard, 607 pp. [Text in Danish and English.]
- Selinger F., 2001: Von „Nanok“ bis „Eismitte“. *Meteorologische Unternehmungen in der Arktis 1940-1945*. – Hamburg: Convent Verlag, 384 pp.