



<http://dx.doi.org/10.11646/zootaxa.3616.5.4>

<http://zoobank.org/urn:lsid:zoobank.org:pub:CF81FC00-8792-4424-A6F5-4CA2AA8A3FCF>

## On the ornithological collection of Friedrich Sellow in Brazil (1814–1831), with some considerations about the provenance of his specimens

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### Abstract

The Prussian naturalist Friedrich Sellow (1789–1831) traveled through Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina between 1814 and 1831 gathering numerous zoological and botanical specimens. Despite the effort spent in those countries, the ornithological collection assembled by Sellow did not receive adequate care after it had been deposited in the Zoologische Museum in Berlin, thus compromising its integrity. In the present article we discuss the treatment given by Lichtenstein and by Sellow to this bird material, with special focus on some cases in which incorrect label information on Sellow's specimens led to faulty conclusions on the zoogeography of South American birds.

**Key words:** M. H. K. Lichtenstein, *Calyptura cristata*, *Pipra tyrannulus*, *Picumnus exilis*, *Cercomacra brasiliana*

### Resumen

El naturalista prusiano Friedrich Sellow (1789–1831) viajó a través de Brasil, Uruguay y Argentina entre 1814 y 1831 colectando numerosos materiales zoológicos y botánicos. A pesar del largo esfuerzo de muestreo hecho por él en estos países, la colección ornitológica montada por Sellow no recibió el cuidado adecuado después de haber sido depositadas en el Zoologische Museum en Berlín, comprometiendo así su integridad. En el presente artículo discutimos el tratamiento dado por Lichtenstein y por Sellow a su material ornitológico, con especial atención en algunos casos en los cuales información equivocada en las etiquetas de sus especímenes lleva a conclusiones erradas sobre la zoogeografía de las aves Sudamericanas.

**Palabras-clave:** M. H. K. Lichtenstein, *Calyptura cristata*, *Pipra tyrannulus*, *Picumnus exilis*, *Cercomacra brasiliana*

### Introduction

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, virtually all knowledge of Brazilian biodiversity was limited to the works of Piso and Marcgrave, published in the seventeenth century. This scenario changed slowly from 1808 onwards, when several traveling naturalists contributed in a more systematic and decisive way to the knowledge of Brazilian natural history (Pinto 1979). Remarkable among these naturalists was Friedrich Sellow (1789–1831), who undertook numerous expeditions to Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina between 1814 and 1831. He collected geological, botanical and zoological samples, and the largest amount of this material was deposited in the Zoologische Museum in Berlin (ZMB, today Museum für Naturkunde Berlin) (Papavero 1971; Pinto 1979).

Despite the importance of the specimens and the many years spent obtaining them, the ornithological collection assembled by Sellow did not receive adequate care after it was deposited in Berlin, due to heavy exchange activities and removal of the original specimen labels, which destroyed the data associated with many of the specimens (Stresemann 1948; Pacheco & Whitney 2001). This situation can lead today to faulty conclusions and significantly affect the apparent knowledge of biogeographic patterns and the history of the distribution of