

Old photographs from family archives ... using historical documents to investigate alien species

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Introduction & Overview

- Historical photographs
- How to identify and collect – some examples to involve citizens
- Other types of information
- Digital collections and involving citizens

What one can find in historical photographs...

- ... the same as in present photographs
- BUT often in **less good quality** and for older periods animals and plants only in black and white
- Likely limited to **larger animals and plants**
- **Invasion dynamics** ? – hard to predict how much can be gained
- How to **approach interested citizens**?



Topothek (topothek.at) – an example of local citizen science



- virtual collection of pictures, maps, video and audio recordings with exact location, dating and indexing
- Objective:
 - to make private historical material and knowledge visible to the general public with cooperation of local people
 - to make it accessible to science
- Most “topotheks” in Austria, meanwhile also in Germany, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Croatia, Romania ...

Example: Tree of heaven - *Ailanthus altissima*



▼ Karten ...

Name

Öltanklager
Handelskai/Freudenau

Datum

Frühjahr 1980

Kommentar

Gemeinsam aufgenommen mit 0408408, 0408409, 0408410, 0408411, 0408412, 0408413, 0408414, 0408415, 0408416, 0408417, 0408419, 0408420, 0408421, 0408422, 0408423, 0408424, 0408425, 0408426, 0408427, 0408428, 0408429, Alle

Tags

Betonummantelung, Betonwand, Bunker, Donau-Öltank-Lager Ges.m.b.H, Freudenau, Gleis, Götterbaum, Öltanklager Handelskai/Freudenau, Opel Rekord D Caravan, Pappel, PKW, Schlagloch, Schranken, Steigeisen (Mast), Zinne

ID

0408418

Urheber

Alexander Schatek

Besitzer

Alexander Schatek

Copyright

Alexander Schatek

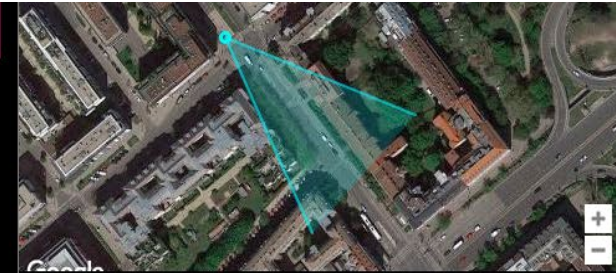
Aufnahme

außen

Medium

Dia, Kleinbild

Example: Tree of heaven - *Ailanthus altissima*



▼ Karten ...

Name

Vorgartenstraße/
Walcherstraße
vermutl. Straßenbahner

Datum

um 1930

Kommentar

Links führt der Gleisbogen in die Walcherstraße. Die Aufnahme ist sicher von einem Arbeits- oder Turmwagen der Straßenbahn aufgenommen worden. Anlass ist vermutlich ein Trachten- und Musikalien-Wettbewerb (Werner Neuwirth).

Ihr Wissen ist gefragt

?

Kennen Sie den Anlass und das
Aufnahmedatum?

beantworten

Example: Fish and fishery associations

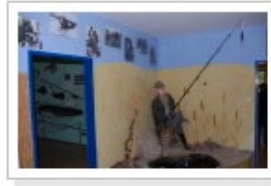
1st Viennese Fishery Museum

1. Wiener Fischereimuseum

ÜBERSETZ

Klicken Sie auf die Bilder, um diese zu vergrößern.

Photographs,
Written documents
Mounted animals ...



Example: Fish - fishery associations

- Peter Pfenninger Schenkung Liefering, founded 1877 (much older predecessor assoc.)



Kuratorium und Fischerinnung der
Peter Pfenninger Schenkung Liefering
Salzburger Fischertradition seit 1877

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HERZLICH WILLKOMMEN BEI DER

1950 wurde die Schenkung in Form eines Sondervermögens

Two further potential types of historical information

- Collect **films** together with photographs
- **Interviews – “oral history”**
 - Identify people who have observed nature, animals and plants for long periods (from private associations of botanists, ornithologists, etc.)
 - Make interviews, maybe based on photographs of targeted alien species

Involving citizens to explore digital institutional collections/sources

- Many museums, archives and other institutions host **relevant historical written documents and visual material**
- Some of them have even already **digitized material online**, e.g. Biodiversity Heritage Library (currently the worlds largest digitization project of biodiversity), less specialized in biodiversity is Gallica (French National Library)
- **It needs huge resources to explore these online collections →**
 - ? Select useful (parts of) collections and involve citizens to analyze and transcribe ...

Involving citizens to explore digital institutional collections/sources

➤ **Example: Plant Letters**

(<https://www.zooniverse.org/projects/catedraunesco/plant-letters>)

- A project of zooniverse (<https://www.zooniverse.org/>)
- Plant letters = a collection of almost **5000 handwritten letters, species lists, notebooks** and other documentation addressed to directors, gardeners and other collaborators of the Botanic Garden of the Univ. of Coimbra;
- Records of Portuguese botanical science and expeditions of plant discovery, collection and identification in more than five different languages covering the period from c. 1870 – 1928
- Kept at the University of Coimbra (UC), Life Sciences Department

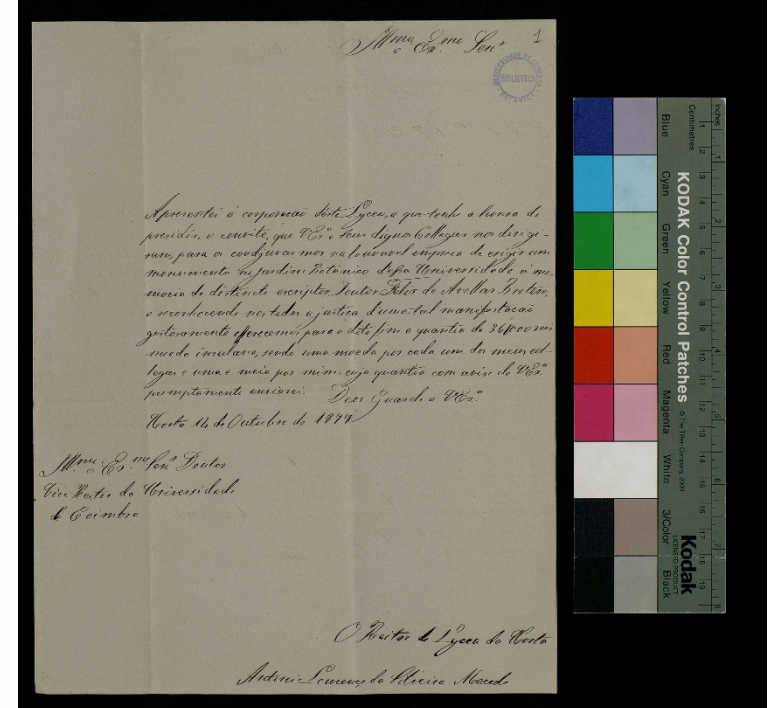
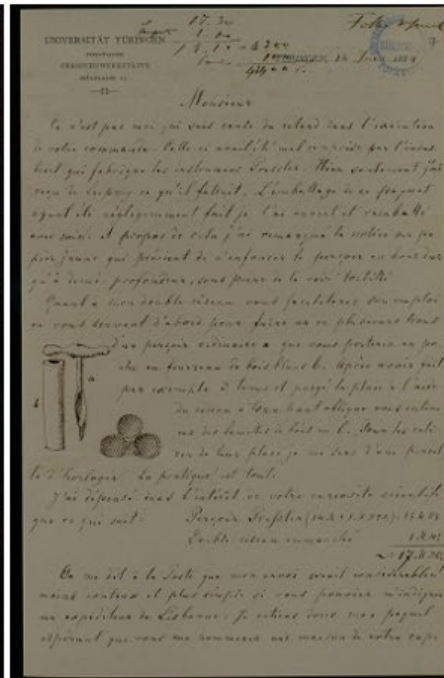
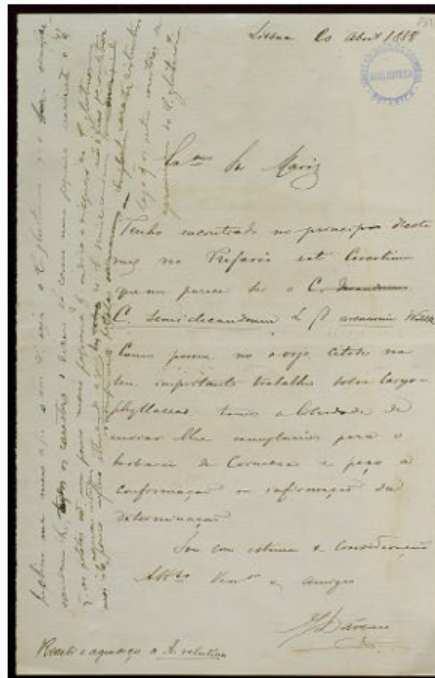
Plant letters <https://www.zooniverse.org/projects/catedraunesco/plant-letters/about/results>

We intend to transcribe a total of 4588 letters, the oldest dated from March 20, 1870.

So far, we have identified 1118 national and foreign correspondents, from academic and non-academic backgrounds.

With your help in transcribing the letters, we want to retrieve information which can include:

- inquiries and doubts on plant classification and taxonomy;
- historical plant species locations, distribution records and abundance;
- biological material circulation (plant and seed exchanges);
- track the path of herbarium and museum specimens in our collections;
- unravel networks of botanical knowledge.



Conclusions – would I have to start such a task ...

- Identify existing (private) associations including e.g. private nature-conservation organizations
- Identify existing private initiatives which host already digital archives (e.g. Topothek)
- Involve citizens for collecting or analyzing existing visual material and for interviews
- Identify institutions such as museums, archives, libraries, which host historical biodiversity material and have maybe already digital repositories
- Select species which promise good results and/or select specific places/regions (esp. for interviews)

A personal announcement ...

Non-Native Species and Biodiversity Change in River Ecosystems: A Historical Perspective



- Research Topic of Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution:
- Call for abstracts: 31st March 2020
- Manuscripts: 30th Sept. 2020

Contact: Gertrud Haidvogel
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Objective in brief:

- To compile and advance knowledge on the long-term alteration of river biodiversity by non-native species

Further details: <https://www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/12695/non-native-species-and-biodiversity-change-in-river-ecosystems-a-historical-perspective>

Thank you for your attention!