Compiled by the Custodian of the Rothschild Collection of Siphonaptera, Department of Entomology, British Museum (Natural History), South Kensington, London SW7 5BD

Please find herewith a list of additional literature for 1978 (list 5) and 1979 (list 4).

1980 - quite an important year!

If an excuse is required for a flea party, one might remember that it is a century ago that flea studies were at last placed on a proper footing by the publication of Otto Taschenberg's *Die Flöhe* (1880). That book contains, in 122 pages and 30 figures, most of what was known about fleas at the time. The flea literature for that year, including *Die Flöhe*, comprises 8 titles!

The beginning of a new century, this year will see - amongst other things - some important publications such as Mardon's volume VI of the Rothschild Flea Catalogue (Pygiopsoilidae), the Proceedings of the 1977 Flea Conference at Ashton Wold and the Cetacephalid volume by Haddow, Rothschild & Traub, while Holland is finishing off his big opus on the fleas of northern America.

If there are any flea workers at all in the year 2080, perhaps they will smile benignly at the state of affairs a century ago.

Let us hope they will.

* * *

**FLEA COLLECTING**

**SOME ADVENTURES AND MISADVENTURES OF W. RÜCKBEIL DURING 1913 - 1915**

We all must have all sorts of memories relating to our activities as flea collectors. In a way we are fortunate that our collecting methods, geared as they are to obtaining host animals and/or their nects, tend to lead to more excitement than those required for many other kinds of insects. Indeed, behind many a specimen label are untold stories of good luck, bad luck, frustration, daring, perseverance, excitement, accident, financial sacrifice, misery and romance.

In the archives of the Flea Room are a number of letters, written in beautiful Cyrillic script (and together with translations), from the professional collector W. Rückbeil (who lived in Djarkent [now: Panfilov] in what was called the Semiretchenskoi [seven rivers] District of East Turkestan). These letters, addressed to the Hon. N. Charles Rothschild, date from 1911 till 10.IV.1915 (Old Style). They contain some very graphic descriptions of Rückbeil's endeavours to collect fleas. In spite of quite considerable difficulties, including domestic trials and tribulations, he managed to collect good material (admittedly, in terra incognita), with representatives of 28 new species (vide: N.C.Rothschild 1913d, e, f, 1915c; K.Jordan & N.C.Rothschild 1915c, 1915b; K.Jordan 1925a, 1926a, b; J.Wagner 1916b, 1926a, 1930a; I.G.Ioff & V.E.Tiflov 1934).

The descriptions of Rückbeil's experiences as a flea collector - at times almost hilarious because of their near-incredibility - are quoted here as a token of admiration for the stamina of the man. After reading one may feel inclined to count one's blessings!

F.S.
[Djarkent, 1911]

Dear Mr Rothschild — I was very pleased to receive your request for me to collect for you parasites off mammals and birds and I was greatly flattered by the price stated which would induce anyone to willingly accede to your request. I thought that I could easily collect them during my journey to the localities to the north of Aksu and I even asked my brother to collect them as he intended to go to Urgutai in order to make a zoological collection. Unfortunately, however, this summer proved to be very unsatisfactory, firstly because there was a terrible revolution in China, through fear of which my permanent assistant declined to accompany me on this journey and my brother did not at that time have the pleasure of going to Urgutai as the Government had prohibited travelling there, and secondly because owing to the complete absence of rain there was a terrible drought in the localities I visited, for which reason I was unable to remain this summer in one spot for several days and in order to satisfy my permanent customer on whose behalf chiefly I went to Aksu, I frequently had to move from one ground to another — each one being drier than the preceding one so that I had no time to occupy myself with the collection of birds' nests from which to remove the parasites you want. . . . . Owing to the drought, through which I lost two horses in the middle of July, I was obliged to move from the southern slopes of the Tyan Shan' to its northern slope. Meanwhile I succeeded in killing three antelopes, one wild boar, several hares and over 100 birds, but on these I only found lice, ticks and some other parasites — probably Mallophaga. As for fleas and bugs there was not a single specimen, and I very much regretted that I had not the time to collect them by staying for several days in one spot . . . .

Village Podgornoye, 23rd May 1913

. . . . It appears that the collecting of fleas is not a very easy task, especially from birds not nesting together. As regards the collecting of fleas from mammals, one can say that that is a more profitable occupation, but one has to carry with one a great many varieties of traps and collect mostly at night time, and also make all sorts of trips, and that is the reason why it goes on so slowly; in order to gather a more complete fauna of these parasites a great deal of time has to be spent — almost a year. . . . .

written by Mrs Vera Gavrilovna Rückell

Djarkent, 5th November 1913

Dear Sir — At the request of my husband I have the pleasure to communicate to you the following. . . . . My husband intended to collect for you the greater part of the parasites, after he had dispatched to Germany the butterflies and beetles, i.e., during September and October, as at that time he could be altogether free, but unfortunately something extraordinary happened in our family, namely: having returned from the excursion to the places south of Djarkent, my husband made preparations for an excursion, in the middle of June, to the north of Djarkent, taking with him my father, who wanted to assist him in the collection of mammals and their parasites, and as at that time the weather was very bad in the mountains, my father could not stand the damp mountainous climate and fell ill. My husband had to return home for that reason and was very glad indeed to succeed in bringing my father home, but he could not prepare for another excursion, as when he brought my father home he found me very ill, and as there was on top of this a child suckling, he had to give up almost all his time in looking after the sick, going now and then for short excursions not far away. As soon as I became convalescent my eldest daughter fell ill, and a week after my second daughter also was taken ill, a few days later two little boys suddenly became ill, thus converting my house into a hospital. I was too weak to look after four sick children and my husband was obliged to remain at home for over a month, besides the District doctor advised my husband to avoid as much as possible any communication with other people. With regard to the material collected for the museum in Germany, my husband could only send it on in October, at the end of which he left for the mountains in order to collect the mammals and the fleas from them, although there still remained two sick children in the family, but on this occasion
also he was overtaken by misfortune: four days ago he returned scarcely alive from the mountains and now he is laid up with a violent fever followed by influenza, now he has rheumatism in the legs and in the shoulder; his temperature was up to 40°, and although the temperature has gone down he still remains in bed, and therefore the material collected for you cannot be sent out at present, which my husband greatly regrets. The fleas will probably be sent to you in December. The fleas collected for you are kept in a good condition; there are among them fleas which my husband has never sent you before. Today I have purchased some ermine fleas; I hope to get some more fleas.

Djarkent, 20th December 1913

My Lord - I trust that you are in receipt of the letter which my wife wrote to you on my behalf informing you about the state of my health, and therefore I do not consider it necessary to explain to you in the present letter the reasons which caused the delay of sending out the parcels with fleas of mammals of our district. I am glad to say that my health is improving, but I still feel too weak to take up the work of preparing the parcels for despatch. After the three days of our Christmas holidays I shall commence to prepare the parcels so that they may be despatched in due course. During the time of my illness my wife succeeded in obtaining a few specimens of fleas, for instance, from the badger, hare, wild cat and a few other animals.

Djarkent, 3rd February O.S. 1914

Now I am fully acquainted with the methods of catching mammals and collecting their parasites so that in the future I hope to collect more fleas than this time. In the vicinities of Djarkent there are still many animals which, so far, I have been unable to catch, as, firstly, I was busy with collecting a large number of butterflies ordered from me, and, secondly, I was ill for a considerable time.

Djarkent, 16th April 1914

I must say that lately I was unable to collect fleas successfully because we had a very wet spring, and the nights were very cold, and I had to take care of my health especially in view of the fact that I am only recovering very slowly from my illness. If you have not yet forwarded your account and the money, please be so kind as to send it now to the address of my wife, viz. Mrs Vera Gavrillonova Rückbei, Djarkent, Somiretshenski oblast. I have left only a small amount of money with my wife for her expenses, and I hope that you will remit the money in due course.

Djarkent, 20 September, Old Style, 1914

Sir - Having only just returned from my wearisome journey in China I hasten to acknowledge the receipt of the money so kindly forwarded by you to my wife. Please accept my sincere thanks for the speedy fulfilment of my request. I regret very much indeed that I was unable to collect anything for you this summer, notwithstanding the fact that I had with me about 40 traps to catch the necessary mammals, as well as a number of glass tubes, a certain quantity of spirit, and everything required for my purpose. In order to be able to obtain a most complete collection of fleas, I took an additional man with me who agreed to accompany me at a salary of 12 roubles per month, I undertaking to provide him with the necessary food. I paid him 4 months salary in advance, but during my journey a misfortune overtook me, and I was obliged to discharge him. This is how it happened: Owing to some unforeseen circumstances I was obliged to leave Djarkent at the worst time of the year, and therefore, I was unable to set the traps on my way from Kuldja to Muzart because the weather was very bad, and in addition to this, I was in a hurry to reach the locality to the north of Aksu in good time so as to be there during the dark nights of the month of May where I had to catch night-butterflies (Arctia rucckbeii) by the light of a lamp, for a higher price. The journey to Muzart was a satisfactory one, notwithstanding the fact that it was raining every day, but when I arrived on the summit of the mountain range, I met with several obstacles, and already prepared myself to return but in view of the promises given by me to a German firm I was obliged to continue my journey over the icy
summit of Muzart where, prior to our arrival, 40 men who were on their way to Kuldja to find employment, perished. On the summit they were overtaken by a severe snowstorm which continued for nearly a whole month. Owing to this snowstorm we were compelled to stay at the foot of the mountain for eight days without being able to do anything. During these eight days our supplies of provisions became exhausted and the horses also were nearly starving. Consequently, we had to choose a direction to Marankol (towards the village of Chotnitchye) and to obtain fresh supplies of bread, tea and sugar, as well as oats for the horses, thus losing five more days, so that we were not doing anything for thirteen days. During the whole time the blizzard continued to rage, and we were forced to stay two more days at the foot of the mountain.

Only then did the blizzard cease, and we were able to go on our journey, but we had hardly left the forest zone behind us when we encountered new difficulties: the horses began to sink into the snow and were unable to carry our luggage consisting of two large and two small boxes in sacks thrown over the backs of the animals. The boxes contained many heavy articles and at some places we ourselves had to carry them on our own shoulders, we often being waist deep, or even deeper, in the snow. Notwithstanding these great difficulties we managed to climb up the mountain hoping to reach the summit where, as we thought, the snow would be firmer. However, the snow which fell during the last few days appeared to be very moist and this, in its turn, had made the lower layers of snow, which had remained there since the winter, quite soft, something like pap, and we could only get over this on foot leading our horses by the bridle. During this journey we were knee-deep in water and our wellington boots were often filled up with snow. We could empty our boots only after having reached places where the snow was firmer, and for this purpose we not only had to take off our boots but also our socks and leg-wrappers in order to squeeze out the water. After having done so, we had to use the same socks and leg-wrappers again. After many difficulties we reached the glacier on the summit of the mountain range, but the way there was still worse, being in many places intersected by ravines, and as there was not a piece of wood to be had, the ravines were crossed with much danger and we had often to roll large stones and blocks of ice into the ravines so as to form a kind of bridge over which both we and our horses had to pass. We did our utmost to bring our horses over the ravines but in a short time we only had one horse left which we used for carrying down our luggage from the glacier. The greater part of our luggage, including Chinese coins and bank-notes, which we had taken with us for covering our expenses during the journey, fell into the gulf, together with our horses when they tried to leap over the ravine and after having reached the other side rolled on the ice down the abyss. In the meantime the weather again became dull and before very long the snow and rain again began to fall. To remain at this place for the purpose of saving our luggage and money would mean to bury ourselves in an icy grave. We remained a whole night out in the open. The next day rain was still falling when we undertook a journey on foot to that place where we lost our horses, but none of us had the courage to go down the precipice for fear of catching a serious malady, as water was flowing from all sides into the abyss and anyone going down would have to stay in the icy water for a considerable time. Happily, on the summit there were two young sarts [natives] who had been sent out by the Chinese Government to repair the roads, they heard our shouting and came to our rescue. For a considerable remuneration they were willing to assist us to regain our luggage and money which had stuck in the crevices, and as the luggage was quite wet, it was with the greatest difficulty that we succeeded in carrying it to the place where we left our horse. All the glass articles were broken, among them being two bottles of spirit, only the glass tubes remaining unbroken. The saddles were damaged and the leather belts were cut, some of our belongings, among them being a kettle for cooking food and boiling the water, appeared to be in such deep places in the ravine so that they could not be reached at all. As to the bread we had taken with us, it had become soaked with water and it was a long way to the next village. After having dried the articles as far as possible I selected only those which were required for the collection of butterflies,
for which purpose I, properly speaking, had undertaken the journey to China. The remaining articles were stored up by me in a cave with the intention to leave them there until my return. Unhappily, the caravans had ceased to travel via Muzart owing to the extremely bad weather conditions. As I did not imagine that on my journey there would be a place still worse than this I put the necessary articles on my horse and accompanied by one man I proceeded on foot on a very stony road to a settlement where I intended to buy a few more horses, it was very difficult indeed to wade through the river Muzart and it was not till after three days that we reached the settlement. It was impossible to buy any horses there as the whole settlement only consists of ten houses, and the inhabitants had only two horses which were in a very bad condition, and two mules on which the inhabitants agreed to bring us to Aksu and, availing themselves of this opportunity, they charged us four times as much as usual. The journey was a very slow one, and it took us seven days to cover a distance which I could have covered with my own horse in any three or four days.

In the meantime, the dark nights during which I had intended to obtain up to 100 Arctia ruerckbeldi had ended. I was also unable to buy horses at Aksu because the price was too high, and I was asked to pay for horses suitable for long journeys in the deserts as much as 80, 100 and even 120 roubles per horse. After I had lost my horses for which I paid 220 roubles it was impossible for me to pay the price asked, and therefore, there was only one way for me out of this difficulty, i.e., the hire a horse for continuing the journey. After having left Aksu I went to the mountain region to the north of Aksu, where I stayed for 15 days and thence along Tohel-tagh to Kutch. At the latter place I bought 2 small horses and after having left my collections there I proceeded to the western part of Kuruk-tagh, which lies between the districts of Karasharsh and Kutchaks. In this locality I stayed for a whole month and as this locality is very high above the sea level I could only collect there butterflies, humble-bees and beetles, and then to return home with these collections. On my return journey I had again to pass Muzart and this only for the reason that some of my belongings were left there. In order to carry them home I had to hire a horse, especially in view of the fact that the backs of our horses had become scarred, and they had still to cover a very long distance; moreover, the money I had left was only sufficient to take me to Djarkent.

Now I regret very much that I was so anxious to obtain Arctia ruerckbeldi for which I was promised a very high price, and that I decided to undertake such a dangerous perilous journey over the summit of the Muzart mountain range, so that I was unable to collect any fleas for which I would have received a certain amount of money.

On my arrival home I had again to face misfortune, namely, after having spent money for obtaining rare insects I am unable to sell same owing to the European war, because the insects were collected for German firms. It is rather hard for me to wait until the war is over as I am in need of money. I sold the horses but again with a loss. I have several times thought over the matter and have decided to offer the insects to entomologists. Perhaps you have friends in entomology and whom you doubtlessly meet, and with whom you perhaps discuss questions regarding entomological fauna of various countries, and therefore, I venture to request you, if possible, to mention to them about my collections, I myself being unable to approach them direct, as to my regret I do not know their names and addresses. . . . .

Djarkent, 16 February (Old Style) 1915

. . . . In my last letter I wrote to you that during this winter I should do my best to collect as many fleas as possible, but when the winter arrived I was obliged to stop the work to a certain extent chiefly on account of the unfavourable weather conditions prevailing in our country at that time. We had some snow in December but afterwards mild weather set in and the air was so damp that, as a result, all kinds of diseases were noticed everywhere.
Later on we had frost owing to which the snow became so hard that is was quite impossible to search for mammals, and even such mammals as the hare and the cat did not leave footprints on the snow, and therefore we had to set traps at the first burrows we had discovered, without knowing whether there were any animals at all. We often found mammals in the traps set at random, but nearly every time when I inspected the traps early in the morning I discovered that the animals caught in them were dead and, because of the cold, stiff as stone. This may be explained by the fact that small mammals cannot bear frost. It is very difficult to look after the traps at night-time, especially if one does not know whether there are animals at all in the burrows. In addition to this I had to reckon with the fact that in our country there is a shortage of spirit in which the fleas have to be preserved. Owing to the war the sale of spirit and vodka has been prohibited by the Government, and alcohol is now being sold only by chemists in very small quantities when prescribed by medical men, provided there is a patient in the family of the buyer. . . . .

Djarkent, 10 April (Old Style) 1915

Right Honourable Rothschild - Yesterday I forwarded you, by registered post, a letter informing you that I intended sending you fleas [mostly collected in 1914; not recorded in print by anyone, therefore presumably lost] the same day and I was very glad of this opportunity, but you can imagine my disappointment when I was told at the Post Office at Djarkent that the parcel which had to be insured for two hundred roubles could not be accepted owing to the present circumstances arising from the war. I was told by the Post Office officials that the British Post Offices do not hold themselves responsible for any losses which may occur if connections with insured parcel are broken because destroyed by mines etc. I was advised to send the parcel uninsured but I decided to postpone the despatching of the parcel until a more suitable time. . . . . I am much afraid that necessity may induce me to offer fleas to Russian scientists while I would not like to enter into correspondence with them as long as I have business connections with you. . . . . Of course, I could forward you those fleas and bugs which I have already at my disposal by ordinary post, but this would be very risky for me and unadvisable.

Yours faithfully,
W. Rückbeil

Mailing List

Addition:
Dr R. B. Endo - Public Health Service, Bureau of Laboratories, Vector-borne Diseases Division, P.O.Box 2087, Fort Collins, Colorado 80522, U.S.A.

Change:
Prof. C.-y. Liu - Department of Medical Zoology, Institute of Microbiology and Epidemiology, Academy of Military Medical Sciences, P.O.Box 130, Beijing [formerly: Peking 1], CHINA

A few titles of general interest:


Mil'kov, P.N., 1977. Natural zones of the U.S.S.R. Moskva (izd. "Nauka"). 296 pp., figs. [map on pp. 22 - 23 very useful, showing the natural zones of the USSR]


Anonymous - Top 20 van de afdeling Bestrijding van Ongedierte. Rat. & Muis 27(4): 71-75 (Siph.: 74-75).


Becker, G. - Professor Dr Fritz Peus zum Gedächtnis. Ober. Ges. naturf. Freunde Berlin (N.F.) 19: 4-16, 1 fig.


Whitaker, J.O., Pascal, D.D. & Mumford, R.M. - Ectoparasites of the red squirrel (Tamiasciurus hudsonicus) and the eastern chipmunk (Tamias striatus) from Indiana. J. med. Ent. 16(4): 350-357.