

# Logistical Natures

trade, traffics, and transformations  
in natural history collecting

**A workshop organized by the joint research project**

**“Animals as Objects. Zoological Gardens and Natural History Museum in Berlin, 1810–2020”**

Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, Feb 13/14 2020

No collection, no research, no natural history museum nor zoological garden without logistics. Traders, colonial shipping routes, transport companies, feed producers and distributors, chemical and pharmaceutical industries, waste disposal infrastructures, but also computerized databases, catalogues, daily veterinary logs, and finances, all take part in forming and maintaining natural history collections. We understand natural history collections to encompass both informational and material collections of specimens in museums and databases, and collections of living animals and other organisms in zoos and botanical gardens. In order to supply these collections with specimens or animals, the objects have to be procured, transported, prepared, maintained, organized, displayed, and disposed of. Furthermore, the objects collected are turned into data and ingested into the changing apparatus of natural sciences. All these operations rely on pre-existing infrastructures, while simultaneously shaping them.

This workshop invites scholars from science and technology studies, history and history of science, technology and media to focus on the trade, traffics and transformations of animal-objects within and between sites of knowledge in their global logistical, political, scientific and economic context. We therefore bring together perspectives on the material and informational infrastructures of animal-objects, which form and inform their care, conservation and sustainability. We encourage special attention to the ways animal collections – be it in zoological gardens or in natural history museums – are assembled, maintained, and consumed through those infrastructures, and to the circulation of objects, organisms, and data. Specifically, this workshop invites contributions concerning translocations of collected organisms and data as well as their traffics between political, cultural and epistemic spaces, between the living and the dead, and between the material and the digital.

Thus, we are interested in contributions that unravel the techniques, artefacts, infrastructures and biographies which transform organisms into objects, data, and assets or subvert these categories. In combining attention to practices and practicalities (Mol 2002; Haraway 1997) with historical sensibilities to rupture and continuation (Nyhart 2009; Kohler 2002), we situate our approach at the intersection of science and technology studies, history, and history of science.

We hold that this focus on *logistical* matters in natural history collecting can provide a generative approach to chart its articulations of nature and society.

In this spirit, we invite theoretical approaches to the logistics of ‘animal collections’ and papers that attend to these practices through specific cases. We aim to collectively rethink the past and present of natural history through its infrastructural preconditions and effects, as well as through its collective and distributed practices, and their transformations over time.

The workshop will focus especially, but not exclusively, on:

- Trade: the history and practices of trade in animals on a local or global scale from barter and gift economies to sales; processes of valuation and devaluation of animal objects; spaces of object distributions, like markets, auctions, databases; the relations between traders, researchers, dealers and collectors, and their respective boundary works.
- Traffics: the itineraries of objects past and present; legal, hygienic/medical and ecological regimes of animal and plant translocations, e.g. CITES, Nagoya Protocol, Cartagena Protocol; data journeys from the field to the database and back, and beyond.
- Transformations: the history and practices of transforming organisms into living zoo attractions, museum exhibits or data sets; the logistics of turning animals into objects and data and the related practices of objectification in animal collecting institutions; thresholds between “dead” and “alive” as effects, intended and unintended, of logistical practices, understood as biological as well as political and technological categories; transitions from the material to the digital (and back) and the infrastructures of data; transformations of the material culture of data and the informational investments in material artefacts.

The workshop “*Logistical Natures. Trade, Traffics and Transformations in Natural History Collecting*” on 13/14 February 2020 will be followed by a second paper-workshop in the autumn of 2020 which aims to assemble a special issue (journal tbc). **Please send your abstract (max. 500 words) and CV to [humanities@mf.n.berlin](mailto:humanities@mf.n.berlin) no later than Sept 20, 2019.** We will cover travel and accommodation costs. For further information, please contact [humanities@mf.n.berlin](mailto:humanities@mf.n.berlin).

The workshop is conceived and organized by the joint research project “*Animals as Objects. Zoological Gardens and the Natural History Museum in Berlin, 1810-2020*”

(<https://www.museumfuernaturkunde.berlin/en/science/animals-objects>):

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