

HEADING REPORT(H)A: Environmental Stories

THE GUAPARÊ SAMPLE FROM THE HERBARIUM (R) OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF RIO DE JANEIRO (MNRJ)

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Sellow's sample at the National Museum of Rio de Janeiro. Source: CRIA (Environmental Reference and Information Center). 2021. Specieslink - simple search. Available on: <https://specieslink.net/search/>. Accessed on: 28 nov.2021.

The image of the sample, which is part of the collection of the Herbarium of the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro, is a species known by several popular names, Guaperê, vassourão, carne-de-vaca, folha-de-bolo and cajuja (scientifically by *Clethra scabra var.scabra*), which belongs to the *Clathraceae* family. They are trees or shrubs ranging from 1.5 to 20 meters tall, found in Latin America in the following countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Brazil, and in the Brazilian case in Bahia and all states in the South and Southeast (Perdiz, Giuletto and Oliveira, 2015). With several uses for society, including commercial, it is used in folk medicine as

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an antidiuretic, anti-inflammatory and antimalarial. It is currently flagged as a target of threat, particularly in the Pelotas River Basin in Santa Catarina, given the clear-cutting and selective logging for pastures and road opening (CNCFlora,2012), so there are measures to recover and reforest areas with these species (Santos, 2019, p.19).

The sample was collected in São Paulo by the German gardener, naturalist and botanist Friedrich Sellow (1789-1831). Sellow arrived in Brazil in 1814 and participated in the 1815-1817 expedition led by the Rhenish prince Maximilian Alexander Philipp de Wied-Neuwied (1782-1867), contributing to the collections of the scientific institutions in Berlin. He was a boarder (today we would say scholarship holder) of the Portuguese crown (Brazil only became independent from the Portuguese empire in 1822) and thus contributed to the collection of the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro (MNRJ). Sellow is an example of the multiple European naturalist travellers who, on their own or with Brazilian naturalists, sought to contribute to the holdings of the natural history museums scattered throughout Europe at the time.

The naturalists travelled through unknown territories, encountering multiple adversities (climate, diseases, mistrust of local inhabitants, opposition from local administrative powers). If some of the natives were unfriendly, others served as guides, knowing the terrain, also using mules and blacks (slaves) to move the boxes of species collection and personal belongings. Nature represents, at the same time, the unknown and the beautiful, which they tried to collect and draw, confirming reports and drawings from previous expeditions, which served to validate the knowledge about some species, or adding the novelty of flora and fauna gathered.

Sellow contributed to the organisation of the flora collections, especially to the Herbarium R at MNRJ, and he is one of the scientists most mentioned in the constitution of the museum's assets. In the late 19th century, the herbarium was transferred to the Horto Botânico (Botanical Garden).

Currently, we have online access to part of the species collection of the natural heritage existing in that Museum and Herbarium by consulting databases such as *specieslink*. This repository created by the CRIA group (Reference Center for Environmental Information) allows access to scanned samples, which, however, only corresponds to about 14% of the samples of the herbarium.

Today we wonder about the scientific validity and the service that this information can provide, that is, how natural history museums and botanical gardens, created in the past, can contribute to science today. The samples were collected, prepared and dispatched by the travelling naturalists, serving for the studies of that time, but those collected samples and the scientific spaces created were interconnected, as part of a scientific network between Brazil and the rest of the world. This network, which digital platforms have streamlined, allows the elaboration of several studies in various areas, didactic and scientific contributions to the identification of scientific heritage, allowing the preservation and eventual loss of species, mapping the evolution of biodiversity from the 18th century to the present.

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