

SÁNDOR LOVASSY' S EGG COLLECTION AT THE BALATON MUSEUM



Sándor Lovassy

SÁNDOR LOVASSY (1855-1946) was one of the most outstanding ornithologists and zoologists of his time, and is still regarded as a leading figure in Hungarian zoology. He did a lot of research on the Ecsedi marsh - which was later drained and has since disappeared - and published a comprehensive work on it. He later became one of the pioneers of Lake Balaton research, as evidenced by his numerous publications.

The *Vertebrate Animals of Hungary and their economic importance*, published in 1927, is a forerunner of its time and is still in use today.

LOVASSY also collected eggs, as was the practice of the time. For the II International Ornithological Congress held in Budapest in 1891, he organised an exhibition using the collection of the Natural Science Museum to show the nesting eggs found there. At that time, even specialists were not very familiar with birds' eggs, so it is no wonder that the exhibition was a great success.

SÁNDOR LOVASSY, however, was - to our great regret - not one of the lucky collectors. His collection of eggs in the Hungarian Natural Science Museum consisted of 253 nest eggs he collected. Unfortunately, this collection was destroyed during the 1956 revolution, but the museum's catalogue miraculously was not damaged, so we know exactly which birds' nesting eggs were in the collection.

The egg collection in the Balaton Museum, compiled by SÁNDOR LOVASSY, contains eggs from 104 bird species, which together form more than 300 nesting boxes. Unfortunately, here too, LOVASSY's work was accompanied by misfortune, because although the collection itself has survived, most of its catalogue has been destroyed.

Our relationship with birds has changed fundamentally over the last half century, as conservation has become a priority. Almost all the egg collections from the past are now in public collections and are used for education and scientific research.

In LOVASSY's time, however, even the description of the eggs of a particular species was of particular importance. LOVASSY was a pioneer in this field, as he was the first to describe the eggs of several species of birds nesting in our country. Later collectors, who could easily reach many places thanks to improved transport conditions, established collections larger than LOVASSY's in the mid-1900s. From the 1950s onwards, the cult of egg collecting died out, and after that, conservation legislation banned taking birds' eggs.

The **Balaton Museum's collection** - unfortunately limited in data - **is now unrepeatable**, so its preservation is particularly important. Given that the eggs kept in the museum date from the late 1800s, they **can play an important role in future scientific research**, as **no other collections from this period have left us egg collections**.

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