

In North America, the great auk was confined to the Atlantic coast of Canada primarily in Newfoundland, where the colony on Funk Island was reputed to have held over 100,000 birds. But by 1810, they had been over-exploited to the point of extinction. In Europe, the auks held on a little longer. Accounts relayed to Newton and Wolley in 1858 by local Icelanders were so vivid and convincing that it was thought a few pairs may still exist at that time – after all, who could be certain when not every coastline or small island had been thoroughly searched? However, the last two birds had indeed been killed years before on the southwest Iceland islet of Eldey. Pálsson describes their tragic demise in detail. Three men had taken a rowing boat out to Eldey in increasingly rough seas; they went ashore, seized the two birds, broke their necks and threw them into the boat. Two eggs, one broken and one whole, were left behind. Two of the men jumped back onto the boat but the third would not risk it. Instead, his boatmates threw him a rope and told him to tie it around him and jump in the sea and they hauled him in.

Such details, ascertained by Pálsson's careful study of Wolley's Gare-Fowl books, have rarely been mentioned in other accounts – indeed who actually dispatched the last great auk was usually denied by each of the trio who killed the last two birds. No-one was willing to take the blame. Thus, with the extermination of the species in Iceland, the great auk passed into history. It is worth noting the last of the species found in Scotland, on St Kilda and at sea near the island of Papa Westray in Orkney, had suffered the same treatment some years earlier.

Newton and Wolley's quest for the great auk made clear that extinction occurred in real time and could be due entirely to human action. This account is informed by Pálsson's anthropological approach to human-animal interactions and the notion of this form of 'unnatural' extinction (p. 102).

Pálsson's book is a fascinating addition to the growing literature on this extinct species.

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RIEDL-DORN, Christa. *Johann Baptist Emanuel Pohl: an Austrian naturalist in Brazil*. Editora Index: Kapla Editorial, Rio de Janeiro: 2023. 249 pp.; illustrated. Price €20. ISBN 9786588306024.

Despite his significant role in the early nineteenth-century scientific exploration of Brazilian nature, Johann Baptist Emanuel Pohl (1782–1834) remained relatively unknown outside specialized circles until now. A member of the Austrian-Bavarian expedition sent to Brazil after the marriage of Archduchess Leopoldina to Dom Pedro I of Brazil in 1817, Pohl was overshadowed by the duo Johann B. R. von Spix (1781–1826) and Carl F. P. von Martius (1794–1868), as well as by his compatriot Johann Natterer (1787–1843). This book, written by Christa Riedl-Dorn with the participation of Luiz Barros Montez, and organized by Cristina Ferrão and José Paulo Monteiro Soares, sheds new light on Pohl's life and work.

Drawing on the traveller's own writings and a wealth of archival documents, Christa Riedl-Dorn reveals the value of Pohl's contributions to the understanding of Brazil's natural and social landscape. Besides presenting biographical information, Riedl-Dorn reconstructs the expedition's scientific, logistical, and political dimensions. A detailed account of Pohl's observations is set within the broader sociopolitical context of European aspirations in the New World. This situates the expedition within the framework of the post-Napoleonic wars era, illustrating how scientific exploration was entangled with political and economic objectives.

Pohl's arrival in Rio de Janeiro marked the beginning of a four-year exploration that extended through Ilha Grande, Mangaratiba and, later, Minas Gerais and Goiás. From the outset, he was struck by the natural beauty of the country. His opinions regarding the treatment of the Indigenous population and critiques of slavery are discussed; his description of the Valongo slave market showing his awareness of the suffering embedded in the economic structures of the time.

The extensive archive material that provides the foundation for the book underscores the role of sociability in science by not only revealing the complexity of the diplomatic and scientific relations that made the expedition possible, but also highlighting how travellers were assisted whilst in the field. Besides the cooperation of Europeans who were in Brazil at the time, Pohl relied on the aid of



native guides, which demonstrates the essential role of local knowledge in enabling European scientific exploration. The book also reveals the interconnected nature of nineteenth-century scientific networks, where knowledge, specimens, and people moved fluidly between metropolises and colonies.

The collections Pohl amassed in Brazil were remarkable in their scope. Among them were thousands of plants, and many mammals, birds, amphibians, fish, insects, shells, minerals, as well as some Indigenous artifacts that act as a testament to his interactions with Indigenous groups. In addition, Pohl not only sent live animals destined for the menageries of the Austrian imperial court, but also arranged the transport of two Indigenous individuals to Vienna; their ultimate fate is a deeply problematic episode reflecting the colonial-era practice of human exhibition.

Pohl's publications were an important outcome of the expedition, with his two-volume travelogue being of relevance not only to historians but also ethnologists, due to the linguistic samples from native Brazilian peoples it contains. Pohl's taxonomic work named numerous plant genera to honour members of the Austrian imperial family, further illustrating how scientific achievements often reveal social and patronage networks. In turn, in recognition of Pohl's botanical work, Martius named the genus *Pohlana* in his honour. Reproductions of depictions of many of these specimens by artists such as Thomas Ender (1793–1875) and Michael Sandler (1790–1850) illuminate this book.

The book is not only a rich biography of Johann Baptist Emanuel Pohl and a valuable resource for historians due to the vast previously unpublished archive material it presents, but also a critical examination of imperial science in the early nineteenth century. It makes a significant contribution to the historiography of scientific travel. The author's rigorous engagement with archival materials and the reconstruction of Pohl's journey offers readers a glimpse into the social, diplomatic, economic, and political dimensions of scientific exploration. Scholars interested in the intersections of science and empire will find much to appreciate in this work.

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ROOKMAAKER L. C. (Kees). *The rhinoceros of South Asia*. Emergence of Natural History series, Volume 6. Brill, Leiden and Boston: 2024. iv, 835 pp.; illustrated. Price €295. ISBN 9789004544888 (hardback), ISBN 9789004691544 (e-book – free pdf download).

On 20 May 1515 the most famous rhinoceros in the world arrived in Lisbon, Portugal as a gift from Mufazar Shah II to the Portuguese Governor Afonso de Albuquerque, who donated it to King Dom Manuel I. This rhinoceros is very familiar to us 500 years later, because it was portrayed in a sketch by Albrecht Dürer, although he never actually saw the animal. He based his sketch on a drawing and letter sent to him in Germany and so he can be forgiven for not getting every detail correct. The woodcut of Dürer's sketch shows a heavily armour-plated rhinoceros with a curious twisted horn planted on its shoulders. The rhinoceros did not survive long. King Dom Manuel I decided to present it to Pope Leo X, but after a brief visit to Marseilles on the way, the ship carrying the rhinoceros sank in a heavy storm at the end of January or early February 1516. This is just one of the many fascinating and highly detailed accounts that have been compiled by Kees Rookmaaker in *The rhinoceros of South Asia*. Rookmaaker has studied rhinoceroses for more than 50 years and is custodian of the Rhino Resource Center ([www.rhinosourcecenter.com](http://www.rhinosourcecenter.com)), which rightly proclaims itself as the largest rhino information website, so there is nobody better qualified to have written this beautiful, sumptuous book.

Packed with information and abundantly illustrated, *The rhinoceros of South Asia* is the new standard reference on the history of three species of rhinoceros known from South Asia: the Indian or greater one-horned rhinoceros, *Rhinoceros unicornis*; the Javan rhinoceros, *R. sondaicus*; and the Sumatran rhinoceros, *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*. However, only one species – the Indian rhinoceros – survives in modest numbers in special areas of the Indian sub-continent today, with the other two hanging on, critically endangered, in tiny numbers in their respective island homes. The book is divided into three