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History of the only specimen of *Purpuricenus kaehleri* (LINNAEUS, 1758) collected after World War II in Poland

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ABSTRACT: History of the specimen of *Purpuricenus kaehleri* (L.) that was last collected in Poland decades ago. The specimen had been located in a private entomological collection from which it was stolen. The circumstances of a theft and a finding of the specimen are given.

KEY WORDS: Coleoptera, Cerambycidae, *Purpuricenus kaehleri*, history of a specimen, Poland.

P. kaehleri (L.) is a species that has not been reported from the area of our country for decades. In the last 200 years in Poland, only 26 localities of this *Purpuricenus* have been reported. The disappearance, or perhaps even a complete extinction of this species in Poland, is explained by, among others, the changes in horticulture that followed after War World II. A common usage of plant protection products, as well as the decrease in the area size of xerothermic habitats might have contributed to the regression of the population of *P. kaehleri* (L.), which reaches in our country the north border of its range (MICHALCEWICZ 2003).

For the last time in Poland, *Purpuricenus kaehleri* (L.) was collected by Ph.D. Stefan ALWIN in Ciechocinek on 15 August 1949 (Fig. 1). The beetle was temporarily labeled. The first label bears the caption: “15.7.49 Ciechocinek”. On its bottom side, a hardly visible caption “lilac” can be seen – which probably indicates the plant from which *Purpuricenus*

kaehler (L.) was collected. In the later period, probably after having realized the importance of the finding, the specimen was granted a label comprising more detailed data concerning the place of the collection (Polonia Ciechocinek-Zdrój near Toruń 15 July 1949). Simultaneously, under this label another one was attached: "leg. S. Alwin." In 1964, the specimen was identified by Ph.D. Stanisław KAPUŚCIŃSKI and supplemented with a classification label (*Purpuricenus kaehler* (L.) ♂ form *typica* det. S. Kapuściński 2.VI.1964). On the bottom of the classification label, there are name initials of the classifier. It seems that the identification of the specimen and the application of the better label occurred at the same time, and was performed by one and the same person—probably Ph.D. KAPUŚCIŃSKI (Fig. 2). Initially, *Purpuricenus kaehler* enriched the collection of the Department of Scientific and Didactic Assistance of the Higher Agricultural School (later the Agricultural University, and now the University of Life Sciences) in Poznań, which was led by Ph.D. ALWIN. Later, the exhibit was moved to Ph.D. ALWIN's private collection in the town of Bojadła near Zielona Góra (MICHALCEWICZ 2003). According to dr. Lech BUCHHOLZA, the assumption that the DSDA possessed the scientific collection is not known for certain. They were mainly unidentified specimens used in the production of didactic assistance. Perhaps, *Purpuricenus kaehler* was included in Ph.D. ALWIN's collection from the very beginning – first in Poznań and then in Bojadła. In the first half of 1970s (1972–1974), Ph.D. ALWIN showed his collection to dr. BUCHHOLZ in a house at Szamotulska Street in Poznań. The said collection contained, among others, a *Purpuricenus kaehler* captured by Ph.D. ALWIN in an orchard (a garden) in Ciechocinek. In 1980, Ph.D. Jerzy M. GUTOWSKI visited Bojadły and met Ph.D. ALWIN and watched his collections. He saw a specimen of *Purpuricenus kaehler* from Ciechocinek and wrote down the data in his notes (an e-mail message). In 1996, Ph.D. informed the administration of the Polish Entomological Society about a theft of valuable specimens constituting the entomological collection. A member of the Łódź Department of the PES was suspected of the theft. In November of 1996, the arbitration court of the PES proceeded to investigate the circumstances of this incident. Despite Ph.D. ALWIN's good will to withdraw the

accusations in exchange of the stolen valuable specimens, the accused did not respond to the last letter of the arbitration court. Therefore, the allegation was considered as justified, thus expelling the guilty from the association of the PES (NIEZGODZIŃSKI 1997).



Fig. 1. Male of *P. kaehleri* collected by Prof. S. ALWIN in Ciechocinek (phot. by M. MILKOWSKI).

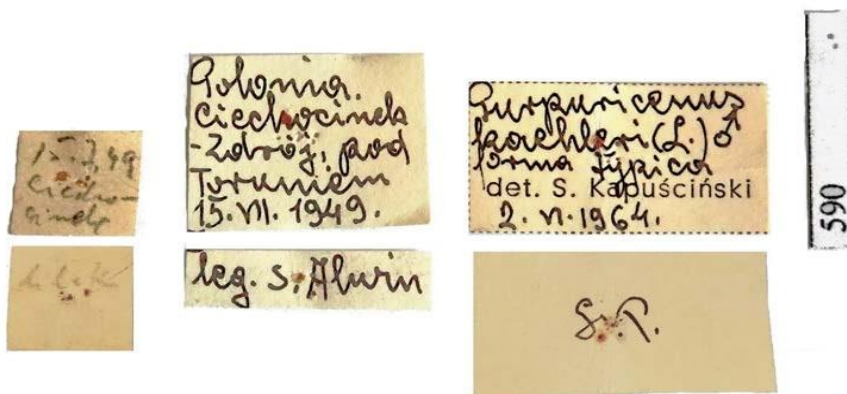


Fig. 2. Labels from the bottom of *P. kaehleri* specimen (the upper and the underside) (phot. by M. MILKOWSKI).

According to a verbal communication obtained by dr. L. BUCHHOLZ, the accused would visit aged Ph.D. ALWIN. He was granted trust and the access to the collection, which he could freely browse. The then director of the Department of Entomology of the University of Agriculture, dr. Stanisław BURDAJEWICZ, as a close and younger colleague of Ph.D.

ALWIN and simultaneously a member of the arbitration court, launched a discussion about the theft among the employees of the department—the activists of the PES.

Ph.D. ALWIN died on 14 September 1997, and his entomological collection included in the Lubuskie Museum Naturalists Club in Świąbodziń (now the Naturalists Club). The collection was, however, not complete—it lacked, among others, a specimen of *Purpuricenus kaehlerii* captured by the professor in Ciechocinek and other valuable butterfly species. In 1998 (or 1999), Ireneusz STRYJSKI, a Lepidoptera collector from Radom, wished to expand his collection with new interesting specimens. During a conversation with the owner of a zoological shop in Radom, he asked if there is an opportunity of intermediating in obtaining a collection of insects, mainly butterflies. He soon received information that there is a possibility of obtaining a neglected collection from Łódź. A Saturday aquaristical market took place there, and one of the exhibitors expressed his will of disposing of an entomological collection. The owner of the zoological shop in Radom soon brought a dozen of cases and cardboard boxes containing predominantly butterflies and beetles (5 cases). It was not clearly investigated who the collection was obtained from on the market. Among the beetles, Cerambycidae species dominated, mainly common species, but among them the *Purpuricenus kaehlerii* from Ciechocinek was also found. The beetles were captured to a great extent, apart from the mentioned *Purpuricenus kaehlerii*, contemporarily by an entomologist (and simultaneously an aquarist) from Tomaszów Mazowiecki—Piotr GRON. STRYJSKI was more interested in butterflies than beetles, and therefore I received an offer that I could take specimens that interested me in exchange for indentifying them. Thus I chose the *Purpuricenus kaehlerii* and it was the only beetle that draw my attention. The butterfly collection contained valuable specimens, but it was in a poor condition—a significant part of insects was covered in mould. What contributed to this state was the storage of the cases in humid spaces, typical of aquarium farms. STRYJSKI put a great amount of effort to remove mould, and as a result the butterflies in majority did not have serious damage, though some specimens were not saved. The *Purpuricenus kaehlerii* was in a good condition, and only a pin bore the

signs of corrosion, which is visible on labels in spots where they were punctured.

The mentioned Cerambycidae specimen was included in my collection of Cerambycidae, receiving no. 590 (I attached a label with this number). Soon after that MICHALCEWICZ's study concerning the occurrence of the *Purpuricenus kaehleri* in Poland (2003) was published. From it, I learnt that the fate of the specimen from Ciechocinek captured by prof. ALWIN are unknown. Immediately, I wrote a list (an e-mail) to the author of the text, informing him that I am a possessor of the lost specimen. In short, I also described how it entered my collection. Dr Jakub MICHALCEWICZ thanked for the information, asking me at the same time to take photos and make labels. Two years later, MICHALCEWICZ mentioned in *Wszechświat* (2005) that the captured specimen from Ciechocinek many years back was stored in my collection. In that article, a photo of the beetle was also featured.

I presented this quite complicated story of one specimen many times among my colleagues-entomologists on different occasions, especially during informal meetings and lobby conversations in the course of symposiums. After a repeated persuasion by dr. L. BUCHHOLZ to present the story of this valuable beetle specimen, I decided to finally do it. I would like to cordially thank him or it. I thank cordially Ph.D. Jerzy M. GUTOWSKI for valuable information and remarks used in this text. I express my thanks to Rafał CELADYN for editing photographs used in the herein publication.

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