

The Mollusc Collection

History

The Mollusc collection exists since the foundation of the Tel Aviv University in 1956. Since most of the staff at that time had been working at the Biological-Pedagogical Institute, established by Joshua Margolin in 1931, the major part of the molluscs present in the collection of "Bet Margolin" found a new home in the collections of the Zoological Department of the university at Abu Kabir.

Prof. Alexander Barash served as the first curator of the mollusc collection. He and his colleague Dr. Zippora Danin were especially working on the Mediterranean marine molluscs. However, all the staff members of the Zoological Department brought back from their excursions in the field land- and freshwater molluscs, and marine molluscs from the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, in particularly from the area of Elat and between 1967 and 1979 from the waters bordering the Sinai peninsula.

After the passing away of Zippora Danin in 1992 and Alexander Barash in 1995, Dr. Ora Manheim took care of the Mollusc collection for a short time. Today Henk K. Mienis and Oz Rittner are taking care of the collection.

Development of the collection

Since 1960 the Mollusc collection has become a permanent place for the repository of mollusc material collected not only in Israel and the Middle East but also elsewhere in the world.

Drs. Lev Fishelson and Chanan Lewinsohn organized in 1962 and 1965 two important international expeditions to the southern areas in the Red Sea falling under the jurisdiction of Ethiopia (now Eritrea). During these Israel South Red Sea Expeditions important material was especially collected in waters in and around the Dahlak Archipelago.

In 1968-1969 Dr. Chanan Lewinsohn carried out important dredging operations in the entire Gulf of Aqaba. At about the same time Dorit Salczman deposited her mollusc material dredged off Elat also in the collection. Marine zoologists of the Tel Aviv University carried out also research off Bardawil (1967-1979) and on Cyprus and Rhodes (1970).

Mollusc material started also to arrive from outside the university. At a regular base mollusc material collected by researchers at the former Sea Fisheries Research Station: Eliezer Gilat (formerly E. Gottlieb), Moshe Tom and others, was transferred to the collection. As a matter of fact the latter material formed the basis for the: "Annotated list of Mediterranean Molluscs of Israel and Sinai" coauthored by Barash & Danin (1992).

When the Sea Fisheries Research Station turned into the Israel Oceanographic & Limnological Research Institute, Dr. Bella Galil continued the transfer of the mollusc material collected off the Mediterranean coast of Israel to the collection in Tel Aviv. After her retirement from that Institute that tradition was recently taken over by Dr. Nir Stern.

In cooperation of Mrs. Svetlana Vaisman also all the mollusc samples intercepted by inspectors of the Plant Protection & Inspection Services of the Ministry of Agriculture are identified and permanently stored in the collection.

In the late sixties the collection of Derk A. Visser (1915-2013), a private collector from the Hague in the Netherlands, was received. This collection contained much material from Western Europe, the Western Mediterranean and Indonesia (including Dutch New Guinea), where he had lived for quite some time. The fossil molluscs present in that collection were transferred recently to the Paleontological Collection in the Steinhardt Museum of Natural History of the University.

That foreign example has been followed by the collections of private shell collectors in Israel:

Arieh Hadar (1913-1968), Tel Aviv: worldwide marine molluscs;

Vital (Haim) Treves (1908-1998), Tel Aviv: worldwide marine molluscs;

Isaac (Jitzchak) Yaron (1934-1985), Beer-Sheva: mainly molluscs from the Red Sea, in particular the Gulf of Aqaba;

Kalman Illes Hertz (1921-2006), Givatayim: mainly micromolluscs from the Mediterranean coast of Israel;

Zvi Orlin (1925-xxxx), Qiryat Motzkin: very extensive worldwide marine collection;

Uri J. Bar-Zeev, Ramat Gan: land snails from Israel and abroad, and marine shells mainly from the Mediterranean Sea;

Na'ama Yellin-Lipschitz (1942-2013): land snails from Israel and abroad;

Hillel Yoeli, Ariel: worldwide marine shells;

Abraham Singer (1923-2016), Tel Aviv: mainly marine shells from the Red Sea and the Mediterranean;

Benjamin Solom (Solly) Singer (1938-xxxx), Rehovot: marine shells from the Mediterranean and Red Sea, but also much material from South Africa and elsewhere;

Shmuel Matalon, Tel Aviv: a worldwide collection lacking any material from Israel;

Yechezkel Ernő Nagy (1933-2014), Givatayim: land- and freshwater molluscs from Israel, marine material from the Eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea (Gulf of Aqaba).

David Bahral (1922-2021), Tel Aviv: chiefly worldwide Cypraeidae, Volutidae and Conidae.

In addition we got the Mollusc collections of the Beit Gordon Museum, kibbutz Degania Alef and the Beit Ussishkin Museum, Kibbutz Dan.

All these collections are revised and newly labelled before they are permanently lodged in the systematically arranged general collection.

In this way the Mollusc collection of the Tel Aviv University developed in 65 years from a small local collection to an important large worldwide scientific shell collection containing over 100.000 fully identified and computerized samples. Among that material are 154 samples of type material.

Belonging to the collection is an extensive mollusc library. Especially in the last ten years it got a boost by various donations consisting of malacological journals and books from the defunct Israel Malacological Society and the private libraries of B.S. Singer, E.L. Heiman and D. Bahral.

Current scientific activities in the collection

Besides the general maintenance work like sorting, identifying, computing the data and storing the material in the systematically arranged collection, much attention is given to the following subjects:

- Taxonomy of the land, freshwater and marine molluscs of Israel and elsewhere in the Levant;
- Monitoring the arrival and settlement of Lessepsian migrants in the Eastern Mediterranean;
- Monitoring the presence of exotic species among the land- and freshwater molluscs of Israel;
- Cases of predation on the land- and freshwater molluscs in Israel.