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THE VAN STRAELEN DECAPOD COLLECTION, INSTITUT ROYAL DES SCIENCES NATURELLES DE BELGIQUE, BRUXELLES

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THERE ARE relatively few large collections of decapod crustacean fossils in the museums of the world. Most of them are well known and serve as depositories for numerous type and figured specimens that are documented in the literature. The purpose of this note is to call attention to the extensive decapod crustacean collection in the Institut Royal des Sciences Naturelles de Belgique, Brussels—a collection that is largely attributable to the efforts of the late Dr. Victor Van Straelen.

Van Straelen was Director of the Institut from 1925 until 1959. During that time he published extensively on a variety of paleontological and stratigraphical problems. He is perhaps best known for his contributions in the area of decapod paleontology. Corin (1965) listed 118 papers published by Van Straelen, the overwhelming majority of which deal with crustaceans. Examination of his work in this area, however, would lead to the conclusion that most of the material basis for his work was that housed in other collections. Most of the type and figured specimens to which Van Straelen referred are deposited in other museums. Thus, the extent of the decapod collection at the Institut is not well known and, because it contains material

that is potentially very useful to researchers, it is important to note its presence.

Well over 1,000 specimens are deposited in this collection. Van Straelen accumulated a large collection of decapods, primarily brachyurans, from several Cretaceous and Cenozoic localities in Belgium and adjacent countries. These are curated with the museum's biostratigraphic collection and the specimens are readily accessible and available for examination. Notably, one single locality of the Rupelian (Oligocene) Boom Clay yielded several hundred superbly preserved specimens of *Coelema rupeliensis* which would make excellent material for the study of biometry, intraspecific variation, and sexual dimorphism. Although many of the specimens are moderately well prepared, some would be enhanced by a more complete preparation of matrix, a task that would be fairly straightforward given the nature of the enclosing sediment. These specimens form an extremely valuable collection.

Van Straelen also amassed a large and extensive foreign collection from various classic localities around the world. Recent cataloguing of this material documented over 740 specimens

arrayed in 153 taxa. In this collection there is a relatively good representation of British Cretaceous and Tertiary crabs and Solnofen Jurassic decapods, as well as specimens and casts of decapods from other parts of Europe, North America, and many other parts of the world. This collection is largely in need of verification and curation; however, it has been carefully stored so that the original labels are intact and the collection is useful. Based solely upon the number of specimens of decapods in this collection, it would have to rank as one of the largest collections in the world. For this reason, it is important that it be brought to the attention of students of decapods in the hope that the fossils be given the study and care that they deserve.

Following Van Straelen's death, his office was retained vir-

tually intact; however, his references and papers on decapod crustaceans were bequeathed to Dr. Sylvie Secretan and are currently shelved at the Institut de Paléontologie, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris. The whereabouts of Van Straelen's catalog of decapod specimens, if one existed, is not known.

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