He was an enemy of all social ills, in particular alcoholism (when he was a student in Dorpat, he founded an anti-alcohol society called Milk Brothers’ Circle, and later the Eleuterya society in Lvov). At the same time, he remained a champion of progressive social ideas (equal rights for women) and wanted to introduce “religion of reason” to bring down any forms of social inequality.

Marek Słupek
Curator of the exhibition:
Benedykt Dybowski (1833-1930); the Constant Knight
the Jacek Malczewski Museum in Radom
December 2009 – September 2010

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Since 1996, the NBP has also been issuing occasional 2 złoty coins, struck in Nordic Gold, for general circulation.

All coins and notes issued by the NBP are legal tender in Poland.

Since 1997, the NBP has issued the Polish Travellers and Explorers coin series. The “Benedykt Dybowski” theme is the ninth in the series.

Information on the issue schedule can be found at the www.nbp.pl/monety website.

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www.kolekcjoner.nbp.pl

The coins were struck at the Mint of Poland in Warsaw.
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Benedykt Dybowski was born in Adamariny near Minsk on 12 May 1833. After he was tutored at home, he continued his education at a Minsk high school. Following graduation from school in 1853, he began to study at the Medical Faculty of the University of Dorpat (presently Tartu – translator’s note). As a student he was awarded the Gold Medal for a paper on the freshwater fish of Estonia. In 1857, Dybowski had to leave the University of Dorpat with a paper on carp family fish of Livonia. In the meantime, Dybowski was temporarily arrested on 8 May 1861 for singing the patriotic song Boże, coś Polskę (God save Poland) in the Vilnius cathedral, but mass demonstrations led to his release.

After his attempts to receive professorship at Cracow University were thwarted by tsarist authorities, Dybowski was appointed professor at the Faculty of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy of the Warsaw Main School. He pursued his scholarly career and at the same time was involved in underground activity. As an extraordinary commissioner of the Polish National Government for Lithuania and Ruthenia, Dybowski was involved in the organisation of the January Uprising of 1863 and in attempts to free the Uprising dictator Marian Lądecki from prison. After being exposed and imprisoned himself, Dybowski and members of the Uprising’s central authorities were classified first category enemies of the Tsar, which was tantamount to the death penalty. However, with his friends’ help this sentence was commuted to ‘12 years of katorga (hard labour) and accompanied with deprivation of civil rights and rights related to his social status (pertaining to him, inter alia, as a university professor).

On 10 August 1864, Benedykt Dybowski started off his journey as a deportee. First, he got to a labour camp in a boatbuilder’s village of Sivakova and shortly set about to organizing a health resort in Daman. Kultuk, a settlement located near Lake Baikal, was Dybowski’s another deportation destination. Here, he started to research the fauna of Lake Baikal and Darwin. Two trips to the Far East were part of this scheduled research project. In 1869, Dybowski joined the expedition of General Skolnik to Amursky kray (territory), Primorsky kray, Vladivostok and Korea. In 1872–1875, he made another trip by himself. He was joined by fellow deportees, Viktor Godlevski and Mikołaj Yankovski, on a boat called Hope to travel down the Argun, Amur and Usuri Rivers to the Sea of Japan.

Dybowski and Godlevski had been reprieved in 1877, and after 12 years they returned home. A year later, the Polish scholar took a government job as a physician in Kamchatka. In 1883, he was back in Poland again to head the Faculty of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy of Lvov (presently Lviv) University. He settled in Lvov, where he had actively pursued his teaching career before he retired in 1906.

Benedykt Dybowski died in Lvov on 30 January 1930. He was buried with honours in the section of January Uprising insurgents of the Lyczakovski cemetery. He left behind a rich scientific legacy of 343 papers, containing pioneering works from a number of areas of biological sciences, and also ichnology, ornithology, anthropology, ethnology etc. It is worth recalling that together with François-Alphonse Forel he is regarded as a founder of limnology – a science dealing with the study of inland waters with respect to their physical, chemical and biological properties (such as thermics, currents, chemical composition, sedimentation, ice regime, as well as qualitative and quantitative aspects of the presence of living organisms). When studying the fauna of Lake Baikal, the Polish scientist also carried out research on hydrology and studied biology of species (inter alia, the Baikal seal and a fish called the golomannyka – accurately describing the manner in which the latter reproduces). Moreover, Dybowski described over 100 new species of Gannarius, amphipod crustacean genus, and several species of fish, and also isolated the Lake’s three fauna complexes. As a propagator of Darwinism, he tried to prove the existence of evolutionary processes triggered by environmental change and geographic isolation. Dybowski’s legacy also includes diaries that constitute a testimony of his times and almost a photographic record of the history of his deportation.

In addition, Dybowski used anthropometric techniques to examine indigenous Siberian people, while collecting objects that evidenced the material and non-material (vocabulary of dialects) heritage of their culture. He was a devoted social worker: he did not only provide medical aid to the peoples of the Zabajkalsky region, the Far East and Kamchatka, but also tried to improve their living conditions via, inter alia, acclimatization of reindeer on the Bering Island. Dybowski earned the nickname “Good White God” from the island’s indigenous people for his commitment to social issues.