

BOOKS

Bauer H.-G., Bezzel E., Fiedler W. (Eds). – *Das Kompendium der Vögel Mitteleuropas. Alles über Biologie, Gefährdung und Schutz. [Compendium of Central European birds. All about biology, endangers and protection.* vol. 1 – *Nonpasseriformes*, vol. 2 – *Passeriformes*, vol. 3 – *Literature and Appendix*]. Second edition. 2005. AULA-Verlag, Wiebelsheim. ISBN 3-89104-696-0. 808+621+337 pp., maps, tables. Hard cover. Price 128 EUR.

This huge work is presented as the second edition of *Das Kompendium der Vögel Europas* published in 1985-1993 by Einhard Bezzel, one of the editors of this issue. In fact, these three volumes are so much revised and changed that they are the new book, prepared by fourteen people under editorship of three of them. This what was saved is a general style of compendium – very condensed information collected in some, always the same for each bird species, paragraphs that make looking for details, in which the reader is interested, simpler.

The book covers all bird species found in the Central Europe defined (the map) as Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland. Even exotic birds that were observed clearly as escapes from zoos or private collections are included into *Appendix* (this seems to be too much to include, *e.g.* a small parrot, originated from southern America, observed in the park around my house in northern Poland!). The basic contents of two first volumes are species-chapters – divided into several paragraphs beginning with their titles given in bold. The scheme of the presentation of data is as follows:

1. **The header:** scientific name – German name – Euring species code; in the second line then scientific name is repeated with taxonomic details: [superspecies name], author(s) and date; in the third line vernacular names in English, French and Spanish are given. The header could invoke two comments: (a) it is totally strange to give the number code for species, which is an internal idea of ringing centres born in the 1960s when all coding was numeric, because the ancient sorting machines did not cope easily with letters – numbers are not memorable and very vulnerable to errors (the error resistant letter codes exist and are successfully used in many coding systems); (b) English names are out of discussion, while two of the three languages used in the header are not suitable for the Central Europe, although authors claimed that they are commonly known there – French speaking people are rare in the Central Europe (now, it is not the XVIIIth nor XIXth century!) and Spanish is an extra rarity – using a term from the avifaunistics. In this area the second the commonest, after German language, is Polish (understandable to Czech and Slovak people too) and, if authors wanted an “international language” – why did not they give Russian (this language is known even to one third of Germans!)?

2. **Taxonomy** – here we can find some comments on the species/subspecies level. Usually here there is nothing worth to comment, but generally in the taxonomy of birds, especially of passerines we are confronted with a revolution. The first revolution is at the level of families – we cannot find most of known till now families in their old “places” in the taxonomical hierarchy: now we are starting from *Corvoidea* (*Vireonidae*, *Oriolidae*, *Laniidae*, *Corvidae*), neighbouring with *Paroidea* (*Remizidae* and *Paridae*) and then *Sylvioidea*, with *Alaudidae* (!), *Hirundinidae* (!), *Panuridae*, *Aegithalidae* and several new families as e.g. *Phylloscopidae* or *Acrocephalidae*. The people who want to find *Motacillidae* at the beginning of the book must go to *Passeroidea* at the end and to meet them between *Passeridae* and *Fringillidae*. Very fortunately the editors supplied the readers with a separate carton sheet where the old and the new taxonomy is listed. The another way to find bird species is to use an index of scientific or German names, which are located at the ends of both main volumes. Readers that are more familiar with English common names and do not know scientific or German ones will have more troubles. The other revolution is in some species that were divided into several ones, e.g. the Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) is split into seven species – the good news for bird twitchers making “life lists”, but the very bad news for ringers who should determine the species of ringed birds exactly (how to separate females and juveniles in these species...).
3. **Identification.** This paragraph is of very unique character, existing probably for compatibility with the general outline of the first edition where it was quite rich in details. Here we have a list of citations only – that means “dear reader, close this book and go to a library...”. This solution (as well as removing of drawings that were presented in the first edition) saved a lot of printing space. Is this a good solution? To my mind – it is not.
4. **Measurements.** This paragraph is a new one in comparison to the first edition – there the measurements were listed in *Appendix*. The measurements given are usually wing length and body mass, sometimes total length or wing span. Usually measurements ranges, numbers and average values are given, but – following a bad custom of most of the handbooks – there are no standard deviations. This makes the data useless for any statistical treatment. It seems that it is time to change this traditional custom from the early XXth century. This comment is of more general nature as the data in this book are usually cited after well known handbooks and looking for original measurements published in different small papers would be really time consuming.
5. **Status.** Nothing special could be commented here.
6. **Distribution and numbers.** General data with estimations of a population size, sometimes with comments on trends, which is surprising because later this is discussed in much more detail (see paragraphs 8-10).
7. **Migration.** General description of the pattern of migration. As it is normal for so general work gaps in information occur and descriptions could not be treated as the state of the art in this area. To my mind this paragraph should be located earlier, just after *Status*, as here it brakes the continuity of the distribution prob-

lem – numbers (par. 6), population dynamics (par. 8), density (par. 9), threats (par. 10), protection measures (par. 11).

8. **Population dynamics,**

9. **Breeding density,**

10. **Threats to the species,** and

11. **Protection measures** are the new problems discussed in this book in comparison to the first edition. This is a reflection of more and more visible interest of ornithologists in the bird protection activity. A lot of this is, however, a repetition from the voluminous book by Hagemeijer and Blair (1997 – *The EBCC Atlas of European Breeding Birds*).

12. **Biotop information** is followed by

13. **Food,**

14. **Voice,**

15. **Behaviour,**

16. **Reproduction and breeding biology** with

17. **Egg measurements** (comments as above to body measurements).

18. **Mortality and longevity information,** and

19. **Moult** paragraphs close the bird species description.

The text is supplemented by distribution maps that are the only graphics in the book. This is a step back in relation to the first edition, which was illustrated by black and white birds drawings and where some graphs presented some data in a visual form. It must be stated here, however, that maps are very clear and easily readable that was not so excellent in the first edition.

In any place of the book there is visible tendency to the presentation of information in possibly the most condensed form. This results in many abbreviations used in the text, which make reading rather difficult. It seems that the editors were aware of this problem as they printed separate carton sheet with around 90 (!) general abbreviations that the reader can put on a table beside the book and use as a kind of dictionary. Apart from the mentioned general list of abbreviations, on its back side there is another set of geographical codes: codelist of countries and codelist of provinces. This last list is surprising very much, if we do not call it “shocking”: the biggest country – Germany – has 16 provinces (landes), small Austria – 10 ones and very small Switzerland – as much as 26 provinces (cantons) while a second country – as to the area – is not listed here at all (for information – Poland has 16 provinces named voivodeships)! But skipping this “political” comment – the coding is not a strong point of the editorial work in the book: country codes are quite strange – one-letter, one-letter with a dot (in order to differentiate countries from the geographical directions – E, N, S or even from the abbreviation of subspecies – UA *versus* UA.), two-letter and three-letter. Why not to use two-letter codes for countries as the EURING does?

The third volume is different from two earlier ones. Its subtitle is *Literature and Appendix*, but its contents show something else: (1) exotic birds in the Central Europe, (2) protection status of birds in conventions, (3) red list birds, (4) breeding

density and trends, next is (5) LITERATURE, and then (6) vocabulary of important terms, (7) list of names in different languages (selection seems to be accidental – these are not languages of countries covered by the book nor they are “international” languages), (8) birds names index for all three volumes (very useful, indeed!). So, it is rather *Appendix, Literature, Appendix and Index* than *Literature and Appendix*. Despite this inconsistency, however, the contents of this volume is very useful. For example, more than 4200 papers listed in the literature is a valuable source of information needed by many students, even in times of widespread availability of Internet databases. Appendices containing information about bird protection will be good and easy to use instruments not only for students of ornithology, but also for members of a wide public interested in the bird protection measures.

The book is technically perfectly done and it is worth to have it in the library of every bird student and more advanced bird lover.

Przemysław Busse

Busching W.-D. – *Einführung in die Gefieder- und Rupfungskunde (Mit Bestimmungsschlüssel zu den Familien)*. [Introduction to a feather study – with feather identification key to bird families]. Second edition. 2005. AULA-Verlag, Wiebelsheim. ISBN 3-89104-695-2. 408 pp., 550 figures (black and white, partly colour). Hard cover. Price 29.80 EUR.

This is another second edition book presented here. The first edition was published in 1997 (finished in 1995). Contrary to the first reviewed book I have no first edition in my hands, so I cannot do comparisons between them and see how much this edition was changed after a nearly decade from publishing the first one. This fact, however, allows to concentrate on the actual contents instead of comparisons between editions.

Even short look through the book gives an impression of a work very comprehensive and rich in details. And more deep study confirms this feeling: this book is really “the bible” for the feather students. It is divided into nine chapters (with Literature, Terms Index, German and Scientific names indexes). Chapter 1 summarizes history of the feather studies and chapter 2 introduces technically how to use the book. This is a very good idea to introduce less specialized readers to special terminology used. List of abbreviations supplements the preparation of the reader to further study. The third chapter – *The basics of the feather studies* – is long (105 pages) and it presents perfectly two levels of the feather knowledge: (1) “the feather” – a single creature and (2) “the plumage” – a system of feather cover of the birds body. The first of mentioned sub-chapters discusses in detail feather building and growth, different kinds of feathers and their colouration details. The second sub-chapter contains a lot of information about different parts of plumage and moulting systems. It is supplemented by a few pages devoted to feather parasites and illnesses. Chapter 4 introduces us into practical problems connected with collection of feathers

– you can find here a lot of advice that could be helpful when you decide to collect feathers not for fun only, but in a such manner that collected feathers could be helpful in scientific studies. Chapter 5 prepares the reader to the identification of feathers collected in the field. This is very important part of the book that allows to use the identification key efficiently – this must be studied really carefully. Chapters 6 and 7 are a little bit out of the general construction of the book and they would be better presented as an appendix. *Modern aspects of the feather studies* (chapter 6) contains two short sub-chapters, written by invited specialists – Manfred Nieceke and Karsten Neuman – and dealing with analyses of feathers contaminants as indicators of the environment condition and with molecular studies on feathers. Even more marginal is chapter 7 – *The feather studies and nature protection* – containing two pages only.

The most voluminous part of the book is chapter 8 – *The identification key to (feathers) orders and families of European birds*. Using it you can identify from what order, family, and in many cases genus or even species, was the individual of which feathers you have just found. This is very helpful in many kinds of studies on bird biology, such as food study, nest building *etc.* The identification process is arranged in a form of “the key” and not “the guide” that is popular in most of field guides published nowadays. This is the form that I like very much – a good key leads a student through a defined sequence of decisions that are arranged by a specialist – who is able to select the best, the most safe characters used in the identification process. Thus, the results are more repeatable when different persons try to identify the same objects. This system is much more convenient for the beginners, who usually are completely lost while using the guide system book instead. As a result such people frequently select apparently simple but less reliable characters as guidelines and the identification becomes unreliable. However, “there is no rose without a thorn...” – the key should be really good and made by a high class specialist. The discussed identification key seems to be indeed such as we want. The key text has the best key type construction – instead of traditional strictly dichotomous shape it allows in many cases to select the appropriate option out of several possibilities. This way the author avoids very complicated definitions of alternatives. In old-fashioned keys the alternatives formulated as *e.g.* “feather brown” – “feather not brown” caused mistakes if the feather we looked at was brown when fresh but faded at the moment of identification. I did not perform many identifications according to this key, but the routes I passed were smooth and not confusing. One of the reasons for this were the excellent drawings illustrating the book. Most of them are black and white, but this, surprisingly, can be their strength and not the weakness – this kind of illustration forces more careful reading of key alternative definitions and understanding them. There is a psychological phenomenon (not widely known) that one confronting the feather, or the bird, with a colour picture believes that the object **MUST** be identical with the picture while in the real world this is rarely the case. However, some colour plates in the book make it more attractive and they are helpful.

To sum up, I am really glad to have this book and I can enthusiastically advise it to many ornithologists and amateurs working in the field.

Przemysław Busse

Arendt W.J., Faaborg J., Wallace G.E., Garrido O.H. – *Biometrics of birds throughout the Greater Caribbean Basin*. 2004. Proc. of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology 8, 1: 1-33, with CD.

This publication is of a very special kind, not easy to qualify what it really is. The idea was clear – to make accessible the morphometrical data taken from many thousand of birds (as many as around 30 000 individuals from 276 species) during forty years of activity (1964-2003) of different people working on 30 Caribbean islands. There are collected data on body mass and eight linear measurements comprising wing length, exposed culmen length, nares culmen length, culmen depth, penultimate primary, tarsus and central rectrix. In description of methods an accuracy of instruments was given (*e.g.* increments of spring balances – 0.2, 0.5, 1, 2 and 5 g; or callipers – 1.0 to 0.01 mm and rulers – 1 mm), but the real accuracy of measurements are still unknown as some of methods – as shown by photos on the paper cover – seem to be quite unusual (*e.g.* the measurement of wing length using callipers with completely unfixed wing, or similar, freehand measurement of rectrices) and not used anywhere in the world. In mentioned cases of wing and tail measurements repeatability of the measurement is extremely doubtful. So, it is a matter of discussion whether data collected using these methods can be useful in, at least some, studies listed by authors as using biometrical measurements: avian genetics and evolution, energetics, morphology and ecomorphology, avian biogeography, population and community ecology. Possibly some of the collected data could be efficiently used in such studies, but it depends mainly on relation of measuring errors to real variation between samples. In highly differentiated populations of separated islands this could be a case. It should be, however, checked by a special programme directed to these problems.

The CD with the data contains biometrical data tables that present summarizing tables in pdf-format and raw data tables in Excel xls-format. The summarizing tables give data as a set of information presenting an average, standard deviation, and min-max as well as *N* (number of individuals in the sample). If possible, sex/age groups are given separately. The data are given a little bit mechanically, when the average is calculated for *e.g.* two individuals. It could be more reasonable to skip average values if *N* is less than, let us say, five or ten birds. This is more advisable as in the raw data tables (these in Excel tables) every single bird measured is presented individually.

Taking into consideration that an access to the data that were totally hidden is better than to know nothing and, especially, that some of measurements are not doubtful as to reliability, publication of such data should be appreciated.

Przemysław Busse