

## BOOKS

**Harrison C., Castell P.** – *Jungvögel, Eier und Nester der Vögel Europas Nordafrikas und des Mittleren Ostens* [orig.: *Field Guide: Bird Nests, Eggs and Nestlings of Britain and Europe.*] 2004. Aula-Verlag, Wiebelsheim. ISBN 3-89104-685-5. 473 pp., 64 colour plates, many black and white drawings. Hard cover, price 29.95 EUR.

This time we have to discuss a really fundamental book, not only for people working on breeding biology of birds, but also for those who ring young birds. Ringing of chicks, so popular years ago when bird ringing started as a method of studying bird migration and breeding biology, nowadays is not so extensive, but still very important. Ringing recoveries obtained from birds ringed as *pulli* are actually more useful for the study than those collected by accidental ringing of full-grown birds. Thus, any help for people ringing chicks is welcome very much. The book discussed here is a second German edition, after the first one published many years ago. Nearly 30 years are really lots of time nowadays, when development of ornithology is so pronounced. This issue is updated and revised.

The introductory part of the book is rather concise, and it contains very basic information. It seems that the book is addressed rather to field ornithologists and advanced bird observers or licensed ringers. For beginners this introductory part seems to be a little too laconic. Then, the book contains very extensive part with descriptions of breeding parameters species by species. A construction of the species texts is standardized: where we can find a nest, how it looks, when we can find it (breeding period), number and description as well as approximate size of eggs, breeding customs, description of chicks and a period of parental care. This part is the main part of the book, and it is excellent. In the middle of the book (and inside of the species texts) there are 64 colour plates with chicks and eggs. As a kind of appendix, at the end of the book, we can find “identification tables” for nests, eggs and chicks. They are probably intended as a help to a person who found a nest, egg, or chick and who would like to identify them. Such construction of the book is rather strange – as to my mind its structure should be opposite: rough identification of a group, consultation with plates and reading the species descriptions to be sure of identification. Another surprising inconsistency in the arrangement of the book is giving plates with chicks first than plates with eggs. Joking a bit, it seems that this is a novelty in the old controversy what came first: “an egg or a hen”. Here the reader must believe that first was the chick and then the egg. The field experience shows however a different sequence: always the first is the egg and then – the chick!

Ending marginal criticism, it must be written that every ornithologist and ringer working within breeding time must have this book when going to a field excursion. In such case it is as much important as having a field-guide while bird watching.

**Przemysław Busse**

**Walz J.** – *Rot- und Schwarzmilan. Flexible Jäger mit Hang zur Geselligkeit.* [*Red and Black Kite. A flexible hunter with tendency to socialibility.*] 2005. Aula-Verlag. Wiebelsheim. ISBN 3-89104-644-8. 150 pp., graphs, colour photos. Soft cover, price 19.90 EUR.

The book is the sixteenth volume of a series of monographs “Sammlung Vogelkunde” that cover separate species or species groups. Within the series the following books were published: Kestrel, Chaffinch, Barn Owl, Bald Ibis, Black Redstart, Dunnock, Lapwing, Bluethroat, Auks of the North Atlantic, Magpie, Robin, European Vultures, Water Pipit, Oriole and Raven. The last one was reviewed in volume 25 of “*The Ring*”.

Each book of the series has its own style and subtitle that summarizes peculiarities of the species described. For the two species discussed in the reviewed book the author selected as specialities their flexibility in behaviour and ecology and their sociality, which is not too common among birds of prey. These two features should be a basis for the welfare of these species in a changing environment. However, the plasticity of behaviour is not the only parameter that influences population success. Both species have some common characteristics, but there are also big differences between them. The Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*) is a species with limited distribution area – it breeds in Europe and winters mainly in Europe, where changes made to the environment are the largest. Therefore, this bird must cope with many more difficult situations than the Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*), which is a species with very broad geographical distribution and a migrant between different continents. Such dissimilarity results in different population trends for the discussed species. As for mortality causes of individuals from both the species, the author summarizes them in the title of the sub-chapter 8.3: *Too much because of human influence*. Then he writes that pronounced part of mortality is still caused by illegal shooting and poisoning. Among the mortality causes there are also listed: electrocution on power lines and collisions, mainly with vehicles – cars and trains (kites frequently feed on corpses of other animals killed by vehicles on roads and train tracks). Surprisingly, windmills, which are frequently listed as a source of Red Kites mortality, have not too pronounced share in man-made death causes.

The book is based both on literature and own observations of the author and this results in a fresh and interesting discussion. Quite a lot of original data give a lot of new information about these fascinating birds. Thus, the book can be recommended not only to the collectors of the “Sammlung Vogelkunde” series, but to all people interested in field studies on birds, especially raptors.

**Przemysław Busse**

**Schulze A., Dingler K.-H.** – *Die Vogelstimmen Europas, Nordafrikas und Vorderasiens.* [*The bird songs of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East*]. 2007. Musikverlag Edition Ample. ISBN 978-3-938147-01-6 (2 mp3-disks), ISBN 978-3-935329-49-1 (17 Audio-CDs). 19:20 play hours. Price 69.95 EUR.

The MP3 format discs are a big step forward in making animals, especially birds, voices accessible to a wide audience. Older, analogue recordings were of much lower

technical quality, voluminous and difficult to handle. Digital recordings open new possibilities to learn bird voices by bird watchers. This skill helps to discover many birds that live in a dense vegetation or behaviour of which is very shy. This need of learning and improving voices identification skill using voices recordings should be accepted as a basic criterion for evaluation published recordings. So, not only technical quality of recordings, but a user-friendly interface when using CD becomes important.

The two presented MP3 discs contain an enormous set of recordings – 2817 pieces of 819 bird species voices. There are songs, different individual calls – alarm, migratory *etc.*, as well as flock noises. The coverage of bird voices is really impressive. The same applies to the quality of recordings – they are excellently cleaned of background noise and well-defined. Technical professionalism is visible, or rather audible, practically in every recording.

This technical perfectness has, however, some weak points if we treat these CDs as a tool for ornithologists and bird watchers to learn bird voices. Learning how to identify bird voices is a complicated process, among others due to different sensual characteristics of learners. Some of them are people that remember voices easily, but they need special association of a new voice to other voices already known. In that case, absolutely clean bird calls are difficult to associate with natural background when they go to a field excursion. So, the strongest point of the discussed recordings becomes their weakness. On the other hand, there are many ornithologists that are visuals – for whom the recognition of voices is difficult. These people need association with any visual cues, at least written information on what they are listening now. Visuals are not satisfied with information changing quickly during listening. Here, the useful information contains only scientific and vernacular names given in three languages, whereas half of the time is lost for the title of CD and editorial details that are the same for all the recordings. What I suggest for visuals, as am I, is playing CDs using PC player that can visualize played track on screen. For example, Windows Media Player can be used, with “Scope” (one of the options from “Bars and Waves”), or even “Firestorm” visualizations. They visualize all partial frequencies in played voice and make comparisons between similar species easy. However, my biggest dream of CDs that can be used for training is a multimedia show with a picture of the bird on one panel of the screen, visualization of the voice played on the second panel and stable, well readable information: bird names and a type of the played voice (song, alarm call, migratory call, begging, *etc.*). To my dream I would like to add also a possibility to switch between a “sterile clean” voice and a voice with the background... I am sure that this is not too much for the present-day electronics. Additional information in the PDF-file is not a good solution – actually it is really irritating.

Nevertheless, I appreciate very much this publication for its completeness and quality. Even without suggested improvements these CDs are really useful.

**Przemysław Busse**

**Bergmann H.-H., Helb H.-W., Baumann S.** – *Die Stimmen der Vögel Europas* [Voices of the birds of Europe]. 2008. Aula-Verlag. Wiebelsheim. ISBN 978-3-89104-710-1. 672 pp., 474 colour photos, 474 + sonogram plates. MP3/WAV DVD. Hard cover, price 39.95 EUR.

The book I am reviewing now is a very good step forward to make my dreams about useful tool to learn bird voices come true. In the previous review I expressed my needs: “my biggest dream of CDs that can be used for training is a multimedia show with a picture of the bird on one panel of the screen, visualization of the voice played on the second panel and stable, well readable information: bird names and a type of the played voice (song, alarm call, migratory call, begging, etc.).” The book I have now in my hands is even more – the book with basic information about every bird species the voice of which we can hear. So, this offer is really complex – both parts, the book and the disk are really well combined.

The book contains a very concise introduction to the bird voices nature, their role, methods of description and learning. In these 30 pages we can find all the necessary knowledge. This part introduces well to a graphic visualization of voices – sonography – that is widely used throughout the book. On the disk this role is played by a 6-minutes-long lecture (*Lernen.mp3*) of the first author, given in very clear and understandable form (even for the foreigners speaking German only a little). However, for the non-German speaking people (there are many throughout Europe!) the weakest point of the book and the disk is the lack of English introduction (at least!) and English vernacular names of birds. Fortunately, there are not only German names, but scientific names too. Many ornithologists and even bird watchers use scientific names. However, it is not enough to solve linguistic problem of Europe – most people using English names do not use scientific ones!

The main part of the book – 590 pages – contains descriptions of 474 bird species and their voices – songs, calls and “instrument noises”. All species descriptions are in a standard form, containing code number, German name, scientific name, pictogram describing habitat preference of the species and photo illustrating how the bird looks. Afterwards there are paragraphs: *Identification of the species*, *Distribution and preferred habitats*, *Voices*, *Instrument noises* and *Possibilities of misidentification*. Voices are illustrated by one to several sonograms (2200 pieces altogether!) supplemented by “a human translation”, e.g. “tik tik tik tik tiktiktktkt trrrr” (difficult? – but sometimes very helpful in learning!). Generally, this construction is perfect – it combines all basic knowledge about species characteristics in very shortened but informative form. This is what bird watchers, and not only bird watchers, want to see. What is more, not only to see but to hear too...

The enclosed DVD contains what we want to hear. The disk contains *Introduction* (*Lernen.mp3*) and a set of 474 vocal “bird portraits” with 914 voices, presented in two formats – low compression MP3, so the quality is protected, and in an original WAV format. The MP3 format recordings are arranged into 50 pieces large blocks, easier to transfer between playing devices. Presented formats have a little different playing characteristics: in MP3 format there are given not only voices, but a picture of the bird could be visible, as well as German and scientific names changing during playing of a piece. In WAV format we have only a title of a played piece. Depending on

a kind of device and software we use, there are some differences in effects – some players allow to see bird portraits while other do not, some players (e.g. Windows Media Player) offer a possibility to visualize played sounds. Some accessible visualizations are only for pleasure and not useful for learning bird voices, but some of them could be very helpful in learning for people who are visuals – they show a whole band of sounds and their dynamics. I could recommend to set the player to: Visualizations → Bars and Waves → “Scope” (dynamic sinusoid) or – for amateurs of stronger pictures – “Firestorm”. A technical quality of recordings is really perfect and voices are cleaned very well. However, so clean recordings are more difficult for those learners of bird voices who are more sensitive to associations of a bird voice and background noises. Weak background sounds could be the best solution – better than extremely clean or totally natural strong background.

There are “no roses without thorns” – I can see two weak points in this publication: (1) language problem, mentioned earlier, which limits distribution of the book very much – here is a big appeal to the AULA VERLAG – translate this book into English as soon as possible, many ornithologists and bird watchers throughout Europe will be really happy to buy an English version!, (2) navigation through the disk is not “user-friendly” – at least add a possibility to search by species in some of the languages, kind of voice or e.g. habitat – this is really not too difficult.

Even though I found these “thorns” I recommend this book to anybody who would like to listen to bird voices consciously.

**Przemysław Busse**

**Richarz K., Hormann M.** – *Nisthilfen für Vögel und andere heimische Tiere. [Breeding help to birds and other animals]* 2008. Aula-Verlag. Wiebelsheim. ISBN 978-3-89104-718-7. 296 pp., many photos, CD. Hard cover, price 19.95 EUR.

The lack of breeding places is frequently a limiting factor in distribution and population number of birds and other animals. The usual reason for a low number of breeding places is human activity, such as cleaning forests from dead trees (hole breeders are limited), cutting old trees (big raptors’ nests cannot be built) or changing customs in building houses and household buildings (urbanized species that long time ago changed their natural environment to man-made structures – swallows, sparrows, storks). So, there is a strong imperative: “*what was by the people destroyed by the people should be repaired*”. Not all human-made changes can be mitigated, but still a lot... This book is a real handbook for people who would like to help different animal species to survive in a changing environment.

The first main chapter gives a general overview of problems connected with wild animals living close to people. The figure, supplemented by the table at pages 26-27, is particularly instructive and shows where in our buildings we can meet our animal neighbours. The next chapter is the biggest (ca 150 pages long) and the most important for bird lovers – *Help for breeding of birds*. Subsequent chapters cover other animals as differentiated as mammals and insects. The final part is the *Appendix* composed of different useful elements, such as the literature list, name index (scientific

and German) and list of different nest boxes (technical advice how to build them is accessible on the CD) – 80 positions, 57 for the birds. The idea to give an extensive list of technical tips is one of the strongest points of the book.

The main chapter is arranged by biotope where some birds nest and by species. Such arrangement allows to get specialist information on how to identify species that is living side by side with us, or on the one we would like to attract to our house, garden or broadly understood environment. There are very good descriptions of various species' differentiated customs, which are so important when we want to direct our activity exactly to a chosen species. As it was mentioned earlier, special technical tips are presented on the CD, what makes it a really significant part of the book. However, there is, to my mind, one big surprise: a PDF-file entitled *What else is important for the bird helper* – it looks actually as a final chapter of the main part of this book, and it should not be placed outside the text!

In summary, the book is worth distributing as widely as possible and any bird helper or non-governmental organization that work in the field of bird protection during breeding time should, or rather – must have it in their library.

**Przemysław Busse**

**Schäffer A., Schäffer N.** – *Gartenvögel. Naturbeobachtungen vor der eigenen Haustür.* [Birds of gardens. Observations of the nature from own house.] 2006. Aula-Verlag. Wiebelsheim. ISBN 3-89104-693-6. 154 pp., many photos, CD. Hard cover, price 14.95 EUR.

This is a book for everybody, a kind of a “starting package” for people who found that just outside their bedroom window a lot of bigger and smaller birds run their lives. These people need some help in first steps of acquiring some knowledge of this life. Furthermore, they can find this help on pages of the book as well as while listening to the enclosed CD.

At the beginning, we can find a very short introduction, one can say a little too short, and then presentation of birds that can be easily met in the garden. The “species portrait” contains scientific and vernacular names of the species, very short presentation of its natural habitat, nest, brood and season for observation, and also more detailed description of identification characteristics, voice (examples on the CD), special information and observation tips. All these information are very brief, however with several photos, so one page per one species is used. Thirty six species are treated in such manner and more than ten winter visitors are mentioned additionally. Then, only three pages are devoted to signs we can identify as traces of birds activity in our surroundings. Seasonality of birds occurrence is given at month-pages, with some observation tips and notes on what we can do for birds in every month. Very interesting is the chapter *Garden for birds*, as well as the next one – *Helping garden birds*. The chapter *Garden birds problems and problems with garden birds* addresses rarely discussed problems that can arise from birds occurrence and birds activity in a garden. The last chapter *Nature protection* is preceded by the one about introducing children to the bird protection and observation. Nonetheless, this is a very correct line of thinking about imprinting the nature protection behaviour onto next generations.



The book is supplemented by a CD presenting about 70 pieces of birds voices and songs. This is a very attractive supplement, but a quality of recordings is a bit differentiated – in some pieces the background is too loud. On the other hand, the background is always loud in city gardens while much lower in the countryside.

All in all, the book seems to be really useful for beginners who want to make some first steps to be bird watchers.

**Przemysław Busse**

**Gebhardt L.** – *Die Ornithologen Mitteleuropas*. [Ornithologists of Central Europe.] 2006. Aula-Verlag. Wiebelsheim. ISBN 389104-680-4. 403 + 204 + 122 + 77 + 24 pp. Hard cover.

This is one more untypical book that I was asked to review in last years (see “*The Ring*” 27, 2: 228-230) – not an ornithological book but a biographical compendium of ornithologists originating from Central Europe. It is even more unusual as it contains exact reprints of four issues of the biographical lists published during nearly twenty years (1964-1980). They are as follows: Part I (1964) – Brühlscher Verlag, Giessen; Part II (1970) – *Journal für Ornithologie* 111, Suppl.; Part III (1974) – *J. Orn.* 115, Suppl.; and Part IV (1980) – *J. Orn.* 121, Suppl. In this edition there is nothing added and this is the biggest and the worst surprise for a reader, who could expect that 2006 edition will be updated at least till 2000. This is even more surprising as the subtitle is: *1747 bemerkenswerte Biographien vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts* [1747 biographies from the Middle Ages until the end of the XX<sup>th</sup> Century] – thus “the end” means in fact twenty years before the end. The construction of the book follows the exact reprint of originals so consequently that the numbering of pages within each part is separate. This is rather strange and uncomfortable to a reader as well as the fact that some corrections and supplementary information to biographies that occurred in subsequent parts are in their original locations. It means that this additional information are in three different places. The only kindness to a reader is the index of names at the end, which allows to find a required biography.

Despite the above critical comments as to the editorial shape of the book, its contents are really amazing as to personal coverage and details given both about known widely, prominent ornithologists and about those local, not well-known ones. For students of the history of ornithology this is a fundamental source of information. As a rule, the mentioned ornithologists are not defined as to their nationalities, however, this is generally acceptable because of two reasons: (1) an international character of the science and (2) sometimes not an easy definition of a nationality in times of imperia that divided Central Europe between them not following national feelings of people living there. This problem is reflected in not too consequent spelling of both family names and first names of ornithologists listed here. I cannot give examples from nations other than Polish – in the case of the Poles, their family names generally are spelled correctly, using special Polish letters (*e.g.* Cygański, Miczyński), but first names are used very variably. Some of them are spelled correctly (*e.g.* Józef Paczoski, Kazimierz Miczyński) while others not – Dunajewski used the name Andrzej not An-

dreas, Szarski – Kazimierz not Kasimir, *etc.* This is, however, a minor comment that does not change a generally very good opinion about the biographical notes.

This book should be, with no doubt, collected in each biological library, despite its value can be fully exploited only by specialists working on the history of science. I hope that somebody will supplement this monument work with biographies of many important ornithologists who passed away during last decades.

**Przemysław Busse**

**Bum-Joo Y.** – *Vögel Koreas. [Birds of Korea.]* 2007. Aula-Verlag. Wiebelsheim. ISBN 978-3-89104-714-9. 375 pp., many colour photos. Hard cover, price 39.95 EUR.

It is extremely difficult to review this book in a scientific journal – as it is not a scientific publication, but a beautiful vision of the bird world seen by the artist, the bird life photographer. One must add – the photographer who devoted all his life to follow the birds in their environment in so little known ornithologically part of the World as the Korean Peninsula in Eastern Asia. Forty five years of work in one book – one can imagine how difficult was a selection of pictures out of 300 000 photos taken! So, all pictures are excellent as to photographic quality and artistic form. Many of them are so unique that it is difficult to believe that “actors” were not arranged by a professional stage manager, but they really did not. The main part of the book is arranged in several chapters that guide us through different aspects of birds life and contain very little text. Really, the text is a secondary element here and this is correct – while going through these pages we should contemplate the beauty instead of acquiring the knowledge. As I mentioned earlier, the bird world of Korea is not well known to a wide audience and the author decided to add some brief information about bird species that he observed in Korea. The list contains in a standard form the most basic information: a colour picture, name, status, geographical distribution, biotope, size and short description. The last part is very personal – *Nature, birds and me* – but each true field ornithologist could find himself there. Why are we so fascinated with birds that we want to be with them for all our days?

This is not a scientific publication, but I believe that every field ornithologist, bird watcher or just a bird lover will enjoy this book so much as I do.

**Przemysław Busse**