

Christoph Moning, Thomas Griesohn-Pfleger & Michael Horn (2010). *Grundkurs Vogelbestimmung: Eine Einführung in die Beobachtung und Bestimmung unserer heimischen Vögel*. 422 pp., Quelle & Meyer Verlag GmbH & Co, Wiebelsheim, ISBN-10: 3494014167, ISBN-13 978-3494014166, 19,95 €.

Facilitating the access to birdwatching by a book is not particularly new. There are examples from anglophone countries as well as from Germany (e.g. “Vögel beobachten” by E. Bezzel). However, “Grundkurs Vogelbestimmung” (Basic course bird identification) is particular up to date and specific to today’s internet generation. The book is part of a new series of basic courses on field identification of different taxonomic groups edited by the same publishing house.

The book is divided into two major parts. The Chapters 1–12 set the general part; the second offers a surprisingly extensive insight into all central European bird families. Single chapters are rather short, the text is interrupted by boxes and figures and invites the reader to skim and browse.

The general part includes everything from equipment (binoculars, literature sources, appropriate clothes etc.) to an introduction to avian behaviour, bioacoustics, and especially to the Where, How and When of birdwatching. These chapters are the strengths of the book, and the experience of the authors who regularly work as tour guides is quite obvious. They have a good sense of humour when combining a cold drink and illustrated bird books as necessary equipment to reflect their own observations (figure on p. 21). However, a Wikipedia definition should never be cited when explaining complex issues as the hand-icap principle (p. 76).

The chapter on “Systematics and Taxonomy” is praiseworthy. Contributing author Daniel Lingenhöhl does not really give an explanation of these terms, but explains on five and a half pages – necessarily only rudimentary – “binary nomenclature” or the “biological species concept”. Some shortcomings can be overlooked here. The author exemplifies the changing character of this scientific field by some huge changes in avian higher taxa systematics. Sadly, his explanation on using italics for scientific names is not completely correct and it is even more regrettable that in some parts of the further text not even the correct parts of his remarks were respected (p. 133 ff. subfamilies wrongly italicised, p.137 genus *Branta* not in italics).

In the conservation chapter, concepts in Germany are compared to those in some neighbouring countries. Many aspects the authors rise are certainly true but perhaps it would have been wiser to generalize a little bit less and



give this issue more space. Feeding birds might be fun but its value for conservation is at least controversial. The figure on page 125 is wrongly marked (it is a “Rotkopfwürger”, “Rotstirnwürger” is an African species).

The second part is systematically ordered by Central European bird families although this order does not seem to be very consistent as non-passerines follow a generally rather conservative concept while passerines are rather ordered by new findings. There are good, compact introductions for every family and therein focus is on the most common birds so that beginners are not unnecessarily confused. Short texts and arrows in the pictures complement information from classical bird guides although some overlap cannot be denied. Graphics on the topography of many different birds increase the learning effect; observation hints enrich the text. However, the authors forgot the huge population of Melodious warblers in Rhineland-Palatinate and more important one should never throw swifts in the air that were found on the ground. The authors may have to take the responsibility for some broken bones in swifts.

So, what's missing? Not much, maybe the unloved glossary but "carpal joint" (Carpalgelenk) and even "taxon" might not be that easy to understand for the beginner. A few more internet sources and examples from Austria and Switzerland would make a broader distribution easier.

There is a growing attention for "citizen science" in organismic biology. The participation of non-professionals has a long history in the study of birds – many important long-term monitoring schemes would be impossible without the help of these so called amateurs. Scientific societies miss young people and there is hardly a scientist who

does not complain about lacking public awareness of his or her field. Therefore the book is not only recommended for beginners but also to those who want to know how to teach their ornithological knowledge and for those Non-Ornithologists who look for stimulations how to prepare the popular science aspect of their organisms in an exemplary way.

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