

Obituary to Jürgen Haffer, Zoologisches Forschungsmuseum Alexander Koenig

* December, 9th 1932 in Berlin

† April, 26th 2010 in Essen



On April 26th, 2010, Jürgen Haffer, a long term guest and research associate at Museum Koenig, as well as member of the Advisory Board of the Bonn zoological Bulletin, died of cancer. His theories on refugial speciation in Amazonian birds, driven by paleoclimate cycles during the Pleistocene, were partly published in the institutional journals and stimulated intense academic debates from my first day as bird curator at ZFMK in 1974.

Jürgen Haffer was born on December 9th, 1932 in Berlin as the fourth child of Margarete and Oskar Haffer. He became interested in ornithology early in his life, studied biology, paleontology and geology in Göttingen, graduated with a diploma in 1956, and completed his dissertation in 1957. Three obituaries describe his life in detail (Vogelwarte 48: 300–301; Ibis 152: 867–868; Anzeiger des Vereins Thüringer Ornithologen 7: 143–150).

Despite of his doctoral degree in geology and his employment with Mobil Oil in Colombia, birds remained his major interest and passion. Between 1958 and 1967, bird observations and an intense analysis of birds he had collected "...during the course of geological field work as

professional duties permitted", Haffer recognized conspicuous distribution patterns and postulated the hypothesis of distribution centers that acted as centers of faunal differentiation and dispersal. These centers are thought to have acted as refugia for Amazonian forest bird species during dry climatic periods in the Pleistocene, and led to rapid local speciation. For his biogeographical works on Neotropical birds, Jürgen Haffer received the Brewster Award by the American Ornithologist Union (AOU) in 1975. His profession led him to several places in the world, including the USA, Iran, Egypt and Norway, where he continued his analyses of bird speciation. His publication on "Species concepts in Ornithology" awarded him the Ornithology Prize of the German Ornithological Society (DO-G) in 1999.

After an early retirement in 1988, Jürgen Haffer had time to enforce his scientific ornithological activities. He was invited for writing the generic accounts of passerines for the "Handbuch der Vögel Mitteleuropas" and to supervise systematic and taxonomic issues in this series, an occupation that lasted for a period of 20 years until 2007. His publication list comprises about 150 scientific articles and some 50 book reviews (For a complete reference list of Jürgen Haffer see Anzeiger des Vereins Thüringer Ornithologen 7: 145–150).

His numerous presentations at meetings of ornithological societies and other conferences were always appreciated and are still well remembered. He received several international honors and was Corresponding Member of the DO-G since 1973, Corresponding Fellow of the AOU since 1989, Honorary Member of the DO-G (1993), Honorary Member of the Neotropical Ornithological Society (2000), and Honorary Member of the Linnean Society of New York (2004). The death of Jürgen Haffer came suddenly and unexpected. Ornithology has lost a scientist with an international reputation and an excellent expert in the field of history of ornithology. He was always a welcomed guest at our institution; we will miss an open minded, friendly, polite and cultivated visitor.

Renate van den Elzen