

Field-guide to central European vertebrates

Exkursionsfauna von Deutschland. E. Stresemann, founder. Band 3: Wirbeltiere. K. Senglaub, H.-J. Hennemann and B. Klausnitzer, eds. Gustav Fisher Verlag Jena, Stuttgart, 12th edition, 1995, 481 pp, 295 figs, 50 plates, DM 55 / ÖS 407 / SFr 53 (hbk). ISBN 3-334-60951-0. [In German]

This is a field-guide to recognize all wild vertebrates living in Germany, that means this book can be useful in the whole of central Europe. Besides the precise taxonomic determination of animals up to the species level, the book provides some basic characteristics of each species concerning its distribution, habitat, life history, reproduction, and behaviour. Because of the system of abbreviations and the concise pattern of description, these short characteristics contain many details.

The 1st edition of this book was issued in 1955. During the following 40 years, only 2 of 11 editions were republished without any changes. The present 12th edition was considerably altered. It is the result of collaboration between seven authors and three editors (all of them are high qualified German zoologists of different domains), and the excellent artist, H.-J. Behrendt. Many data as well as nomenclature have been brought up to date. The system of dichotomic keys has been extended to all distinguished animal categories. Many illustrations have been either improved or redrawn. As a consequence of all these alterations, the 12th edition of the book comprises 481 pages (compared to 340 pages of the 1st edition). The value of the scientific information included in the volume, along with the technical quality of the illustrations and overall reproduction have increased greatly. This is especially visible in the chapters concerning amphibians and mammals. Figures clearly but precisely show features, separating the different species. Those of bats are especially worthy of praise.

Although the book in the present form is very good, the next editions (I believe they will be issued in the future) can be of course improved. For example, the first thing which should be corrected at once is the explanations of complex figures. In different chapters they are made by following different styles. As a result, eg some figures with birds are difficult to read. In most of the modern field-guides, the most important features of given species are marked by (very useful) arrows at illustrations. In this volume such arrows have been used only at the illustrations of mammals, whereas they undoubtedly would be very helpful in determining of all other vertebrates. The other point causing some doubts is the systematics used for mammals. The authors had some free choice in this matter. However, it is worth the readers' attention that the editors of this field-guide have retained some outdated names and position of some taxons in their system. For example, family *Zapodidae* is retained instead subfamily *Zapodinae* within family *Dipodidae* as suggested at present (Wilson and Reeder 1993); family *Gliridae* instead of present family *Myoxidae*; families *Cricetidae* and *Arvicolidae* instead of present subfamilies *Cricetinae* and *Arvicolinae* within family *Muridae*. Seals are still excluded here into separate order *Pinnipedia*, whereas they are included into order *Carnivora* at present. Moreover, some orders are placed in this book in a different sequence than it is admitted in the present systematics of mammals.

Nevertheless, this book is good and honest field-guide which was and is needed on the book-market and readily bought. It is testified by the fact that eleven editions were sold out during the last 40 years. The 12th edition is considerably revised and improved. Therefore, I recommend this book with a clear conscience to zoologists working in field, ecologists, students, foresters, hunters, anglers, amateur naturalists and to all other persons who need concise but reliable knowledge about vertebrates seen in the wild in central Europe.

Reference

Wilson D. E. and Reeder D. M. (eds) 1993. Mammal species of the world. A taxonomic and geographic reference. 2nd edition. Smithsonian Institution Press in association with the American Society of Mammalogists, Washington and London: 1-1206.

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