Biologists in the Age of Totalitarianism

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Personal Reminiscences of Ornithologists and Other Naturalists

By

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Translated from German by Brian Hillcoat, Leela Sashidharan, and Mike Smart

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For Sibylle (*1942 - †2010)

Conceal nothing, for time, which sees all and hears all,
will reveal all.

Sophocles (5th century BCE; *Hipponous,* fragment 323).

CONTENTS

TRANSLATORS' INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE EDITION

Brief biographies of biologists, ecologists, or ornithologists might not sound like the most exciting reading matter. In most anglophone countries such careers tend to follow the same pattern: upbringing in a solid middle-class home, a good degree at a respected university, post-graduate study on a chosen topic, a certain level of recognition (perhaps even international), publications, awards and honours, respect and authority in a particular field. Their names are rarely known to the general public and only very exceptionally do any of the organs of the state pay them any attention, and if they do it is most likely to be the tax office. So all in all a harmless comfortable life, perhaps even appearing bit boring to outsiders.

Yet in some countries at some times the lives of biologists can be anything but routine. Their political opinions, race, religion, even their scientific ideas can suddenly be of life-changing importance. The lives of individuals, their families and colleagues can be turned upside-down; prison and even death can cast their shadows over the most harmless activities, sometimes all because of a chosen profession. Such was often the situation in Eastern and Central Europe, and in much of Asia, during the 20th century, when biological ideas were thrust into the centre of political ideologies. By examining the careers of the naturalists (mostly victims but also some perpetrators) caught up in these deadly mechanisms, Eugeniusz Nowak documents how such political catastrophes shaped their lives, work, and characters. The reasons for persecution are many: refusal to support nonsensical or damaging scientific ideas (Lysenkoism in the USSR, race theories in the Third Reich); being on the 'wrong side' in undemocratic systems or civil wars; suspicion of working in the interests of enemy powers. The titles of Chapters 2 to 6 broadly categorise these different aspects.

But Nowak's book is much more than a detailed account of over 40 ornithologists and nature conservationists. It is 'lived' history. Nowak, whose own scientific career brought him to both sides of the 'Iron Curtain', met biologists from East and West and tells their extraordinary stories, enriched by documents and photographs from dozens of archives.

Dr Eugeniusz Nowak was born in 1933 in Poland, a country that was soon to be crushed between the millstones of two ruthless dictatorships.

His later career meant that he travelled extensively and had contact not only with fellow ornithologists and conservationists but also with government officials in many different countries. In the mid-1950s, in the slight thaw in the Cold War following the death of Stalin, though still facing a bewildering array of bureaucratic and political hurdles, he was able to fulfil his ambition of post-graduate work in Berlin under the supervision of Erwin Stresemann. He completed his Magister in Berlin, then after gaining his PhD in Warsaw – on the range expansion and ecology of the Eurasian Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) in Europe and Asia – Nowak's interest shifted to wetlands, and in the early 1960s he worked for a time close to another very famous ornithologist, this time Sir Peter Scott at his Wildfowl Trust at Slimbridge in southwest England. There he was in the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB), and was part of the team that eventually, after exhaustive negotiations and conferences, created the 'Convention on Wetlands of International Importance', better known as the Ramsar Convention after the Iranian city where it was drawn up in 1971. During this time he continued his academic career as a lecturer at Warsaw University. In 1974 he moved to West Germany where, in the Federal Research Institute for Nature Conservation and Landscape Ecology in Bonn, he was involved in the drafting of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (the Bonn Convention). Later, and until his retirement, he was a scientific advisor at the UNEP Secretariat of the Convention also in Bonn. So this range of personal and professional experience makes him the ideal author for a book of reminiscences such as those presented here.

Dr Nowak knew personally the majority of the scientists in these biographical accounts, and explains in his own introduction why he decided to devote many years of painstaking research to the collection of these narratives. He hopes that lessons can be learned from the past, but when we look at the political world today we might be experiencing the beginning of new kinds of totalitarianism in the forms of increasing intolerance, mistrust of science, and the uncertain long-term effects of the accelerating digitisation of our lives.

Brian Hillcoat, Leela Sashidharan, Mike Smart

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The subject of this book is the difficult working conditions and tragic fate of many scientists in the 20th and late 19th centuries. Forty biographical accounts deal with researchers in various branches of the biological sciences, especially ecologists and in particular ornithologists and conservationists. They include people of diverse status, from Nobel prize-winners to ordinary birdwatchers. They come from thirteen countries and several continents, from Beijing to New York, though we concentrate mainly on Central and Eastern Europe. They have one thing in common: nearly all of them worked either under the National Socialist regime in Germany, under Communist regimes in Europe or Asia, or under the rule of the authoritarian Russian tsars in Poland, the Baltic countries and Russia itself. The majority (with their families) experienced injustice, suffering and repression on a tragic scale: a variety of restrictions on work, ideological pressure, dismissals for political reasons, persecution, as well as public humiliation, surveillance by secret police, arrests, incarceration in prisons, Communist labour camps or National Socialist concentration camps, very often with fatal consequences. Desperation led to suicide, and one death sentence, decreed for political reasons, was carried out. In a few cases the perpetrators of these crimes, or those who acquiesced in them, derived personal advantage from the prevailing conditions; some laboured in later life under a burden of guilt, others managed to continue successful careers. This work deals purely with those working in the biological disciplines, but their fate certainly mirrors the destiny of others working in the whole spectrum of scientific research.

The impulse to embark on these biographical investigations came to me at the Annual General Meeting of the German Ornithologists' Society in 1993, shortly after the reunification of the two German states, when specialists from West and East were once again able to assemble in conference. The year before, Professor Ernst Schäfer had died at the age of 82; he was a successful German biologist and Tibet specialist, who had been appointed an honorary member of the Society in 1940 by Prof. Erwin Stresemann, the supervisor of his doctorate and at that time the General Secretary of the Society. In the Society's journal a detailed tribute was paid to the work of Prof. Schäfer, in which his previous close connections to high-ranking, powerful National Socialist figures in the Third Reich were described. To my surprise, one participant objected to the mention of these

'non-scientific details'. Following a response from the author of the obituary the argument died down. The ensuing rapid change of subject showed that people were not ready for a more profound discussion, or that limited knowledge of the entanglement of science and politics was the reason for the discretion. In later years this has changed, and the programmes of the annual conferences now include biographical and historical presentations.

The Society's governing committee invited me to report on my own experiences; the reason for this was that I am a Pole, born in 1933. I studied biology in both Poland and Germany, and spent half my life in the land of my birth, the other half in Germany. I have thus had personal experience not only of the two great European dictatorships, but also of times in which Poland and Germany lived in democratic freedom. I also lived through the Second World War and the following Soviet occupation of eastern Europe, which resulted in an alienation between Polish, German and Russian scientists. Since I was soon to retire, I decided to look into the life histories of numerous well-known figures in the field, many of them deceased but many of whom I had known personally, and to publish my findings. The results have been published in book form, not only in German (2005, 2nd edition 2010) but also in Russian (2009) and Polish (2013). The positive reactions from many readers have encouraged me to prepare an English version.

This English edition is distinguished from its predecessors not only by the differing selection and number of biographies but by two new ones that have been added. I regarded the three previously published language versions as a kind of reconciliation with the evils of the past, and also as an encouragement to mutual understanding and the establishment of friendly contacts throughout the regions where German, Polish, and Russian are spoken. These hopes were, it would seem, premature. In the meantime doubts have arisen as to whether the 21st century really will be the epoch of peace many of us believed was possible. Now it appears that this book should perhaps rather be understood as a warning about the future…

E. Nowak.

Bonn, November 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincerest thanks to all those listed below under 'Contemporary witnesses', to everyone who provided me with photographs, and to all archivists, librarians, etc., as well as to the many readers and reviewers of the various editions of this book for their useful comments and advice. They confirmed my belief that this work filled a gap in the 'official' memories of institutions and individuals in the life sciences that has existed up to the present day. Insufficient attention has been given to the price paid by so many of their colleagues who went before, as well as to the misdeeds of many others. My special thanks go to the translators Leela Sashidharan and Mike Smart, and in particular to Brian Hillcoat who also edited the entire text.

I am deeply indebted to my late wife, Sibylle Nowak-Stalmann, for her intensive, always creative discussions and impressive editing skills. It was not Sibylle's fate to see the new edition of this book. Only now do I realise just how important her contribution to the completion of my project was. Our many years together gave me the strength of character to tackle such a difficult task. She helped me overcome many setbacks and encouraged me not to be downcast. She created the free time I needed, but at the cost of her own work. For all this and much more I thank her – belatedly ...

Eugeniusz Nowak

CHAPTER ONE

PROFESSOR ERWIN STRESEMANN (1889-1972) – *ONE OF THE MOST PROMINENT BIOLOGISTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY (AND THE SO-CALLED 'POPE' OF ORNITHOLOGY)*

Stresemann elevated the standing of ornithology within the biological sciences with his work, and in turn his ideas had a great effect on the development of biology. His status is reflected in the humorous epithet (see above) attached to his name during his lifetime. His work will be often mentioned in other biographies in this book, a testament to the impact of his scientific influence.

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Ornithologists with an interest in history never did succeed in finding out who gave Stresemann, the scion of a Protestant family, the nickname 'Pope'. However he earned this honour at an early stage in his career on account of his special and recognised status in ornithology:

- From 1921 to 1961 he successfully guided the fate of the ornithological department of the Zoological Museum of the University of Berlin. After his retirement he remained there, working actively until the end of his life.
- From 1922 to 1967 he held leading positions in the most important scientific ornithological society in Germany: he was general secretary till the end of the Second World War, from 1949 he was the chairman and president, then honorary president from 1967 until the end of his life.
- From 1922 to 1961 he was the editor of the *Journal für Ornithologie*, the oldest and one of the leading scientific journals in the field of ornithology in the world.

- In the years 1927 to 1934 he published the work *Aves* (a part volume of the monumental *Handbuch der Zoologie*), a book that raised ornithology to a respected and integral position within the biological sciences.
- In 1930 at the age of 40 he was elected President of the 8th International Ornithological Congress in 1934 in Oxford, overseeing this global meeting of ornithologists with great success.
- He was not only a versatile, thorough, and very productive research scientist (with around 700 publications to his name) but also encouraged a huge number of young talented scientists in their careers.
- Under his guidance, 30 students of ornithology completed their doctoral theses, and several of them (e.g. Wilhelm Meise, Helmut Sick, Ernst Schüz) contributed significantly to the development of ornithological knowledge and the biological sciences (Ernst Mayr, Bernhard Rensch).
- He was an honorary member of 15, and a corresponding member of 12 ornithological or natural historical associations on four continents, as well as a member of two German scientific academies and one American.
- In his honour more than 70 newly discovered animal taxa (mostly birds) were described with scientific epithets containing his name.

It is not surprising that a 'papal' association occurred to the young amateur ornithologist Heinz Tischer of Magdeburg in the middle of the1920s, but he penned this thought only in his memoirs (Tischer 1994: 80-81):

> whoever has been received by the Pope in a private audience would not have felt more honoured than I did when I was allowed to enter Germany's ornithological inner sanctum: Professor Dr Stresemann's study. […]. It was the first time that I had met an elegant professor. One without a full beard, without a paunch, without any quirks. Because of his international connections he did not use German names for any birds but only scientific ones, and those also only in abbreviated form. He appeared so cosmopolitan that I could only look with perplexed astonishment when he talked casually of Lord Rothschild's collections in the small town of Tring near London.

At the end of the visit Tischer was invited for lunch.

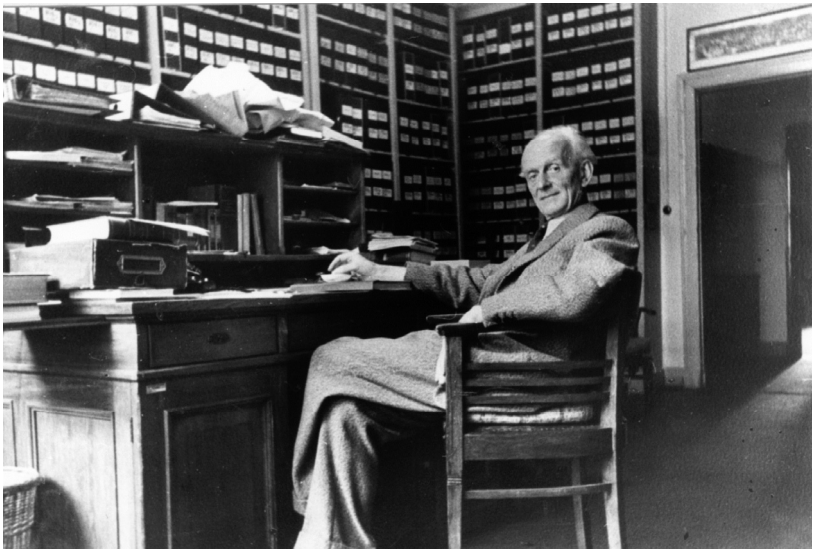

Fig. 1-1: Prof. Erwin Stresemann in his study in the Zoological Museum of the Humboldt University of Berlin (in the mid-1950s).

As a Polish exchange student in the years 1956 to 1958, I was fortunate to be allowed to work with Stresemann as my mentor on my dissertation for my master's degree on the expansion of the Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) in Asia and Europe and was able, about 30 years after Tischer, to experience a similar introduction. After my arrival in Berlin I went with a certain apprehension to Stresemann, as I had been warned in Warsaw that he was a strict, hardly accessible monocled Prussian with a dismissive air. I saw nothing of that before me as I entered his study. A tall, slim professor in a well-fitting suit in the fashion of the time, with a normal tie, without monocle or beard, shook hands with me smiling and cordially asked me to sit down. The large study actually looked like a temple of science because of the many books on the shelves. During our first discussion I saw in him a man without any eccenticities, a professor in the true sense of the word. After some small talk about my journey and my impressions of Berlin, he went straight to the point: the tasks awaiting me were described clearly so that even with my inadequate German I had the structure of my work clearly set out before my eyes. He seemed quite determined and his self-assurance was very plain. A certain elitist attitude was evident, but no severity, the whole discussion was carried out in a friendly tone. Stresemann asked me whether I had understood everything

that he had said. I answered the question in the affirmative, however with the request 'to speak slowly and loudly' (I mistakenly understood at that time that 'loud' meant 'clear'). Speaking his sentences very loudly the professor continued with the conversation till he took me to my future place of work. I was then handed over to his assistant Gottfried Mauersberger, who showed me among other things the library and the bird collection (we inspected a skin of the Collared Dove, a bird which I had still never seen in the wild). Somewhat surprised by the loud tone of the professor I looked in the dictionary to see the meanings of 'loud' and 'clear', so when I told Stresemann about the linguistic error he laughed heartily. Now it was clear to me that he also had a sense of humour! I also was invited to lunch, but a few weeks later, so it was clear that I wasn't a visitor here only for a day.

Such were my personal impressions of Professor Stresemann, who was then 66 years old. Here I would like, as in most of the other biographies in this book, to narrate his life story. Less attention is paid here to Stresemann's scientific successes; Jürgen Haffer and others have published a most excellent work dealing with these aspects (Haffer et al. 2000: 159-446). By contrast, my account will focus on the influence of socio-political pressures on the work and life of this great researcher. He was one of those who experienced the whole range of the chapters of 20th century German history: the German Empire, the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, the occupation period by the allied forces, the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic, and that political curiosity 'West Berlin'.

A further issue in the case of Stresemann is of general interest: how does one become famous, and ultimately a scientist well known far beyond the borders of one's own country, so early in life as was the case with him?

Both these aspects are discussed in the following sketch (for additional material, see Haffer 1997, Haffer et al. 2000 and Nowak 2003b; most of the citations without source references are from these works).

Stresemann came from a well-to-do, educated Dresden family; his father owned a flourishing pharmacy in the Elbe metropolis. Already in his youth his inclinations towards natural history and ornithology were supported and promoted by his family. He himself was ambitious, often seeking expert advice, and with determination and hard work deepened and extended his ornithological interest until it gradually became a scientific activity. He read constantly. The children in the Stresemann household (Erwin had three sisters) were supervised by an English tutor, so they learned English at an early age.

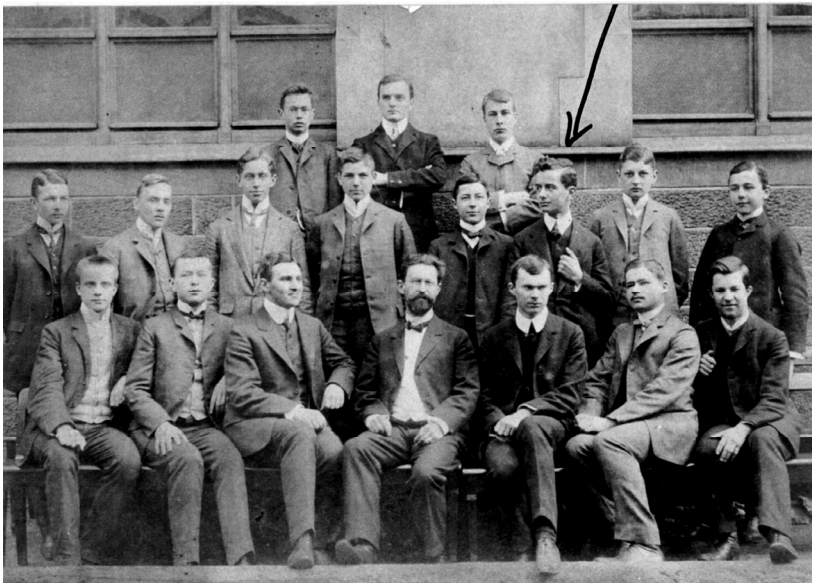

Fig. 1-2: The *Abitur* [school-leaving] class of the Vitzhumsche Gymnasium [grammar school] in Dresden, with teachers; the arrow points to Stresemann (1907 or the beginning of 1908).

In grammar school young Stresemann went on educational excursions, to the region around Dresden, the Alps, the Riesengebirge hills, or to the islands of Helgoland and Bornholm, and his eyes and ears were constantly aware of the birds in these environments. He did not hesitate to venture on distant and exhausting journeys in order to see different and new things. Together with a school friend, he went in 1907 to the latter's mother who lived in Moscow, using the visit to explore the surrounding villages, from where he returned with an interesting collection of raptor skins which he presented before the participants of the annual conference of the German Ornithological Society (DOG) in the same year in Berlin. They are still preserved in the ornithological collection of the Berlin Natural History Museum.

In 1908 Stresemann began the study of medicine in Jena (doubtless under his father's influence), but while there he made sure to attend the lectures of Prof. Ernst Haeckel, the famous zoologist and philosopher, laying the foundations of his broad approach to biological questions, though in 1909 he transferred to the medical faculty in Munich. The Bavarian capital was an important centre for ornithological research at that

time, and it is not surprising that Stresemann soon made contact with the supervisor of the ornithological collection of the Bavarian National Museum, Carl E. Hellmayr, and began to devote his time to scientific ornithology, to the extent that his medical studies necessarily suffered. Under Hellmayr's influence Stresemann began to make a name himself in ornithological systematics. Even then he had an instinct for research methods that promised something new. For example, although Johannes Thienemann, founder of the ornithological station at Rossitten in East Prussia, had received severe criticism for his bird-ringing experiments (among others from Hermann Löns), Stresemann became one of his ringers. But scientific curiosity created the desire to venture on a genuine, exotic, scientific expedition. The specific occasion for this was Stresemann's occupation with bird systematics (the importance of this line of research became clear to him during his participation in the 5th International Ornithological Congress in Berlin at the beginning of 1910). To continue this research it was necessary to get new series of skins from regions of the world that had hardly been explored, in which the occurrence of new endemic species or undescribed subspecies could be expected.

There was soon an opportunity. Stresemann became acquainted with Dr Karl Deninger of Freiburg, who was organising a second expedition to the South Moluccas islands, and obtained his permission to participate. The study trip was to be for two years and was not without its dangers, as there were still headhunters on some of the islands and tropical diseases awaited the Europeans. But the new candidate did not let any of this scare him: 'A still "free" young man, it appeared to me, should be allowed to risk his life', he noted later.

Three research scientists from Germany formed the core of the expedition: Dr Deninger (as the leader), who was responsible for the fields of geology and anthropology, the physicist Dr Odo D. Tauern, also from Freiburg, for physics, geography and ethnography, as well as the student Stresemann, responsible for zoology and botany.

The latter made his preparations for the tasks ahead hurriedly, but very thoroughly. He travelled to Leiden, London and Tring, to view material from Southeast Asia in scientific collections and look for relevant publications. In the Rothschild Museum at Tring in particular he found generous expert support in Dr Ernst Hartert and the owner of the museum, Lord Walter Rothschild. The participants bore the major share of the high cost of the expedition, but the material collected was to be later sold to scientific institutions and museums (the zoological items to a large extent went to England). It had even been decided to have their own seaworthy

motor sailboat, the *Freiburg*, built in Holland, so that they could reach islands that lay far from the regular shipping routes during any season.

Initially it was planned to travel by the Trans-Siberian railway to reach their destination, but it turned out to be more favourable to take a ship from Italy. After a journey of 22 days on the steamer *Prinz Eitel Friedrich* the three scientists and the major part of their equipment reached Singapore on 15th September 1910; the motor sailboat ordered in Holland was not ready on time, and was only delivered two months later. The three made use of the time to travel to Kuala Lumpur by train and to undertake expeditions on the mainland of the Malayan Peninsula, which proved very successful. Back in Singapore they proudly boarded the *Freiburg*, only to find after a few months with waning enthusiasm that the boat was unsuitable, even life-threatening, and had to be sold. Despite this disappointment, with support from a number of native helpers and porters the three scientists managed to explore the islands of Bali, Ambon, Seram, and Buru, accumulating a huge amount of scientific material. Stresemann in particular emerged as an excellent expedition worker. Apart from thousands of zoological and botanical objects, among them more than 1200 bird skins, he also collected extensive ethnographic material, devoted himself to researching the languages of the islanders, and returned with hundreds of high-quality photographs.

Naturally there was no shortage of problems. In spite of the fact that Deninger undertook a socio-psychological check of both his companions, one of them proved to be unfit as an explorer: Dr Tauern's behaviour provided so many grounds for irritation that the collaboration with him almost had to be ended. The warnings of fatal dangers before departure proved to be correct; Stresemann was twice close to death. In a night of strong winds the jib boom swept him from the boat and he was left upside-down outside the hull with one leg caught in the railing. He had to save himself as no one else was on deck. Later he suffered blood poisoning on the island of Seram, lying in a remote shack for days without medical aid, but he finally overcame his severe illness.

These and many other difficulties did not hinder Stresemann's personal and scientific successes: after half a year 'in the field' he wrote to his parents (21.3.1911): 'I have come to love the country and its people, feel like a native among the islanders'. After the conclusion of the expedition at the beginning of April 1912 he reported in a letter to Hartert in Tring (11.4.1912): 'The expedition went very satisfactorily, and I also returned home more healthy than when I left'. He described many of his experiences in a later report (see Haffer 1997: 858-906).

Fig. 1-3: Stresemann on Seram being tattooed with a tribal symbol; this soon developed into a very painful septic inflammation (Oktober 1911).

After his return in summer 1912, despite having registered with the faculty of medicine in Freiburg, Stresemann's yield from the expedition was so promising that he immediately began with the scientific processing of the extensive material. To this end he again stayed with Hartert in Tring. By 1914 about ten publications by him (around 340 printed pages) had appeared, among which were accounts of a few birds unknown to science (including the Bali Starling or Myna *Leucopsar rothschildi*, which even represented a new genus), many new subspecies, and a number of other ornitho-geographical, biological, and ecological discoveries. With this the young man laid a solid foundation for his future.

The news that there was a hard-working, already distinguished young ornithologist spread around Freiburg and Munich, resulting in a very

unexpected outcome: Prof. Willy Kükenthal from Breslau, initiator and editor of a major *Handbuch der Zoologie* [Handbook of Zoology], invited Stresemann to work on the volume *Aves* (birds). This extremely flattering proposal came at an inopportune moment, since the 24-year old student still wished to finish his studies. Despite this he agreed.

However this successful stage of his life was overshadowed, not to say violently interrupted, by political events: war broke out in summer 1914! One would have thought someone who was a scientist through and through would have looked on such a development with scepticism or rejection, but it was not so. Stresemann greeted the event with enthusiasm, like most German intellectuals ('It has begun! The Emperor has ordered general mobilisation and we young people are indescribably excited.'). He joined the war as early as September! The patriotic atmosphere, fed by the nationalist sentiment that prevailed in the German Empire at that time, surpasses our imagination today.

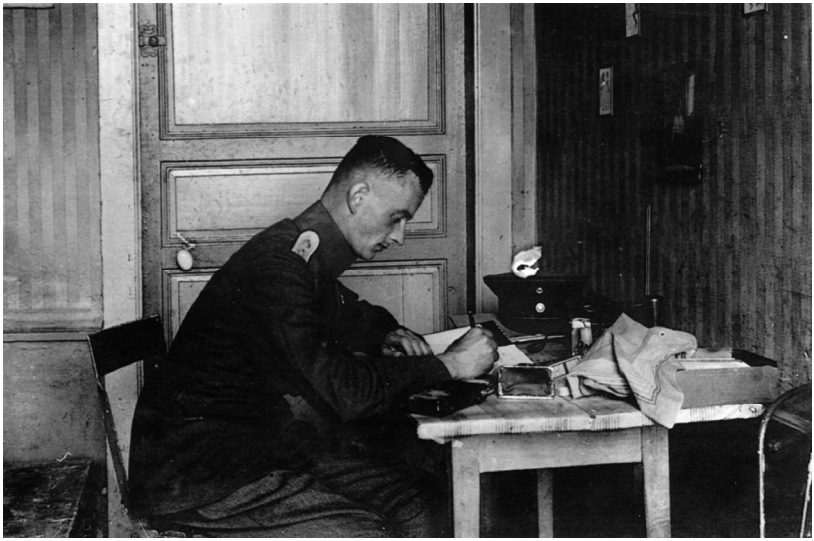

Fig. 1-4: Stresemann as a soldier making entries in his diary (probably 1917).

Stresemann remained in the army until the end of the war. He served most of the time on the western front, being transferred to Italy, the southern front, in September 1917. He spent much time in the field artillery as the lone 'crewman' in a tethered balloon, correcting the accuracy of his comrades' shelling. He made use of the opportunity to

observe birds, measuring their altitude by means of a military rangefinder. He found time for many other opportunities to watch birds, also going on a bird hunt and preparing skins. A short period of home leave was spent on his scientific work and visiting family and friends. He was able to attend to his personal and professional correspondence as well as his ornithological work in his field post; galley proofs of his publications were sent to him at the front. He kept a diary containing not only his ornithological observation notes but also some frightful war experiences which he could not entrust to his field-post letters. His correspondence and diary are also evidence that he participated in murderous combat action, including at Verdun. Many of his comrades died, and his enthusiasm for the war died increasingly too with time. Some letters reflect his longing for peaceful work, some also his despair concerning the war.

During a short period of leave in 1916 Stresemann married Elisabeth Deninger, the sister of the leader of the Moluccas expedition, who was studying medicine in Munich. After his transfer to the Italian front (he was 'photograph officer', i.e. staff photographer) he had an accident, suffering a severe leg injury. This might be considered a stroke of luck for he survived the war; his brother-in-law Karl met 'a hero's death' in Italy in 1917.

Many years later, when Stresemann related his experiences during the First World War, I believe I always heard a tone of condemnation in his accounts. His sons however are of the opinion – in interviews a few years ago – that he regarded the outcome of that war not only as a catastrophe for Germany but also as a personal defeat, something he hardly got over.

After the German capitulation Lieutenant Stresemann returned to Munich to his wife and daughter, who was already one year old. Some weeks after the proclamation of the German Republic (later known as the Weimar Republic), on his 29th birthday, his second child, a son Werner, was born. This joy could hardly lighten his personal situation after the war; political confusion swept the country, money began to be worth ever less, and delivery problems became more and more acute from week to week. Travel abroad was no longer possible (the museum in Tring was thus inaccessible), even letters to scientists beyond the borders were not answered on account of continuing enmity towards Germany. Even worse: the British Ornithologists' Union expelled all German members from the society. The question now arose whether the young scientist, after participating in a war for more than four years, would be able to reestablish his academic contacts and get the chance to continue his research.

The programme of work at an international level he had embarked on years before had to be reduced to what was feasible. He registered at the

University of Munich (in the zoology department of the faculty of biology, with subsidiary subjects geography and anthropology, therefore no longer medicine) in order to conclude his studies as soon as possible. The faithful Hellmayr from the Bavarian State Zoology Collection, a trusted friend from Stresemann's student days, arranged for a sparsely remunerated but interesting scientific job: the assessment of a large ornithological collection from the Balkans.

With his usual energy Stresemann set to work, and just one year later, thanks to the support of his wife, the skins from the Balkans were dealt with, and a thick volume bearing the title *Avifauna Macedonica* was published in 1920. Even the studies of the student couple made good progress. In the meantime Prof. Kükenthal, who after the war had become the Director of the Zoological Museum of the University in Berlin, renewed contact to remind him about the volume on birds for his *Handbuch der Zoologie*. Stresemann reaffirmed his commitment and began to write a sample chapter. It seems that this profusion of tasks did not discourage the newlyweds, but spurred them on. In March 1920 Stresemann completed his PhD under Prof. Richard von Hertwig, in May 1920 he sent a chapter of *Aves* to Kükenthal, and in 1921 Elisabeth Stresemann completed her medical studies.

Kükenthal paid him an extraordinary compliment: he accepted Stresemann’s text without any suggestions for alterations! This was however poor consolation, for the young doctor now required a secure job, and for this only one area of study could be considered: research in the field of ornithology, preferably in a prestigious university natural history museum. An illusory wish in postwar Germany, where all such jobs were filled. In desperation Stresemann planned to emigrate to the Moluccas, a place he still remembered fondly, in order to operate a private research station there. Elisabeth was prepared to accompany him, to assist him in this task while at the same time working as a doctor. He consulted Hartert in Tring briefly about his plan. However the experienced researcher, who had become a close friend, reacted sceptically. In addition the rampant inflation worked against it; Stresemann’s cash reserves dwindled (he wrote desperately to Hartert on 4.5.1920: 'I am working on calculating […] the costs – a gloomy chapter. Sometimes I am close to melancholy.').

During this hopeless situation at the end of March 1921 Stresemann received a telegram from Berlin: Kükenthal informed him that he could get a position in the Department of Ornithology of the Zoological Museum of the Friedrich-Wilhelm University (later renamed Humboldt University) in Berlin as successor to Anton Reichenow! An amazing turn of events, but a well-deserved reward for all his hard work.

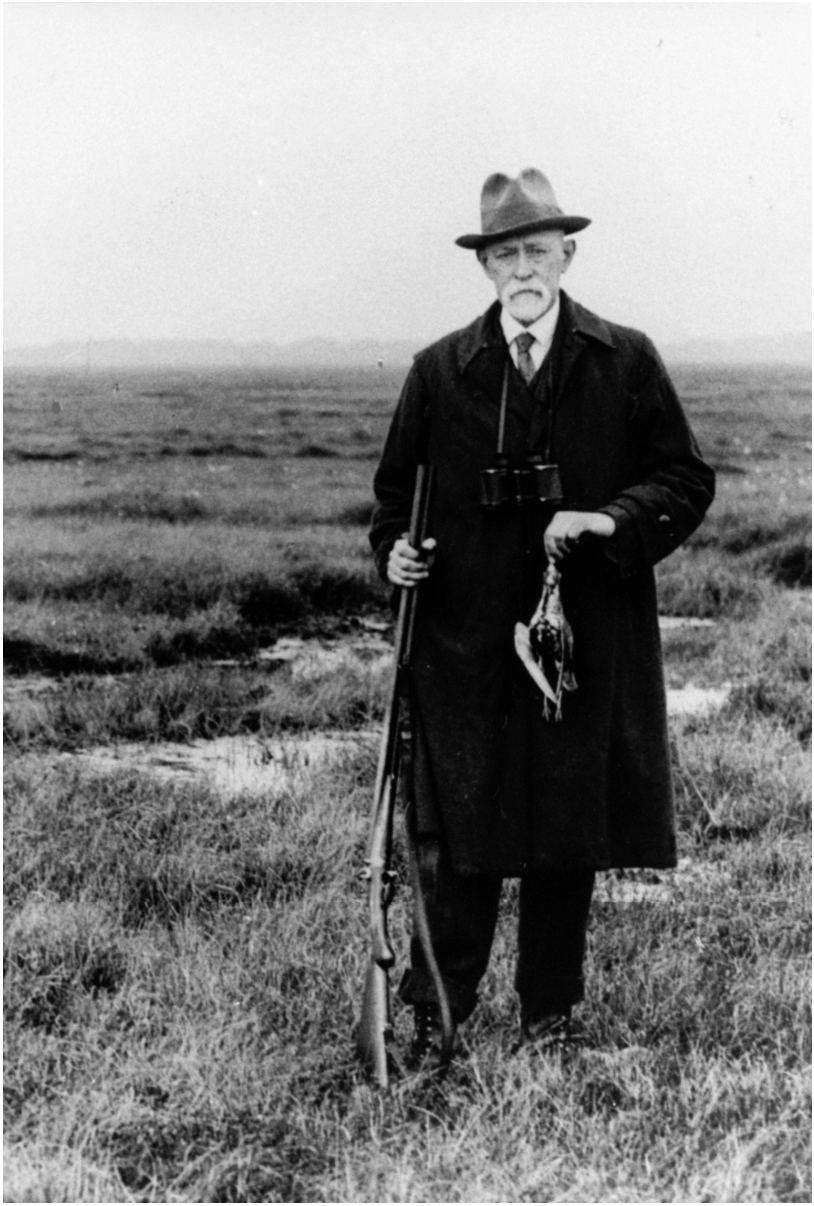

Fig. 1-5: Dr Ernst Hartert of Tring, Stresemann's teacher and fatherly friend (1926).

On 15th April 1921 Stresemann was already in the job. Naturally the conditions in the Department of Ornithology did not meet his ideals, but he set about with his usual enthusiasm to extend the Berlin Museum so that it eventually became 'Germany's ornithological inner sanctum', as Tischer put it. The dusty collection of skins was rearranged, the large gaps in the library filled, contacts were sought to peers and/or future pupils, and he took over the editorship of the journal *Ornithologische Monatsberichte* [Ornithological Monthly Reports], filling it with much improved content. A year later Stresemann also took over the publication of the *Journal für Ornithologie*, founded in 1853 and the world's oldest existing ornithological journal, immediately raising its quality to a new level. The majority of German ornithologists soon discovered his leadership qualities and elected him to be the General Secretary of the *Deutsche Ornithologische Gesellschaft* [DOG; German Ornithological Society]. That was however too little for the 'cosmopolitan character' (as Tischer wrote). The barriers to 'hostile' countries abroad had to be removed; it is perhaps only due to Stresemann's scientific authority that this occurred so early. Written contacts to the most important research scientists and institutions abroad functioned once more. The first foreigners visited the Berlin Museum: James P. Chapin of New York and Richard Meinertzhagen from London. Soon travel restrictions for Germans were eased and Stresemann travelled in September 1923 to his colleagues in Sweden and Denmark (his comment: 'Ornithologists as such are better human beings'), in November 1924 to London and finally again to Hartert in Tring.

Even his private life ran smoothly: his wife moved with both children to Berlin and resumed work. Their material situation also improved after inflation was checked by the introduction of the *Rentenmark* in 1923. The third child, born in 1924, was named Ernst in honour of Hartert.

Stresemann was definitely not very happy with the political situation in the Weimar Republic. The German nationalist upbringing in the parental home, his school, the student body (although he was probably not a member of one of the many fraternities) all shaped his views. He paid homage to 'the Iron Chancellor' Bismarck, whom he considered an admirable leader and diplomat. However he became more liberal during the period of the Weimar Republic. He did not share the radical slogans being voiced by the various political groups that had arisen in Germany, in particular the agitation against 'aggressive' foreigners and Jews. Together with Hartert he called for the convening of the postponed 6th International Ornithological Congress, which was to have taken place in 1915 in Sarajevo of all places, but was of course prevented by the war. The aim was to mitigate or remove the hostile atmosphere, at least among

ornithologists. This major event took place in May 1926 in Copenhagen, in neutral Denmark, with Dr Hartert as President. The Congress was not only a scientific success but was also praised as the 'reconciliation Congress'.

Back home Stresemann was confronted with an exciting episode (which I call historic). Two radical nationalist newspapers (one of them the *Reichswart*) published editorials in September 1926 in which they abused the then Foreign Minister Dr Gustav Stresemann of being a friend of 'International Jewry'. The articles bore the title "Papilio Stresemanni Roth." and quoted the *Internationale Entomologische Zeitschrift* [International Entomological Journal], which offered this newly discovered rare butterfly for sale. The abbreviation 'Roth.' was correctly interpreted by the author of the editorial as 'Rothschild' (Jewish name!), who by giving the name *Stresemanni* was thanking the Foreign Minister for his liberal-conciliatory foreign policy and wanted to honour him in the scientific name of the newly described butterfly. Erwin Stresemann (who was not related to Gustav Stresemann) read this article and published a sarcastic reply in two daily newspapers at the beginning of October 1926, which in part read: '… a small error has been made by the *Reichswart* and I would like to rectify it here. *Papilio Stresemanni* was not dedicated to the Foreign Minister Dr Stresemann by Lord Walter Rothschild but to the undersigned, who is not involved at all in politics, who discovered it in 1911 […] in the high mountain region of the island of Seran and handed over the butterflies collected to the zoologist Lord Walter Rothschild D. Phil. as one of the best experts on Indo-Australian Lepidoptera to process them'. Only after this contribution did the mistaken attack on the Foreign Minister became clear. He invited the zoologist Stresemann for a discussion, which the latter even mentioned to me during my sojourn in Berlin; I had the impression that he held the Weimar politician (who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize at the end of 1926) in high esteem. This historic episode was further evidence of how much Erwin Stresemann was opposed to the then prevalent antisemitism.

Several doctoral candidates worked in the museum under Stresemann's guidance around this time. His mentoring of the younger generation of scientists had two objectives: the curator of the Department of Ornithology wished to impart his school of thought and fields of research to the next generation and – by the assignment of corresponding topics for their dissertations – to access knowledge essential for the completion of his *Aves* book, which was being pursued with much enthusiasm.

In the middle of the 1920s Stresemann decided to add another field of work to the assignments of his department: the deployment of zoological

expeditions to distant countries to collect new specimens for systematic and ornithological studies. In this field he had of course excellent experience with his Moluccas expedition, however this time there was a lack of the necessary funds. His international connections came to his aid: contacts to the Natural History Museum in New York, which was also searching for new zoological material but in addition had the necessary money. Dr Leonard C. Sanford, who managed the assets of the museum in New York, soon concluded a pact with Berlin: Stresemann would select the explorers, prepare them professionally, and send them to the expedition areas, while most of the costs would be borne by the Americans and the findings shared by both museums. The plan was implemented and functioned successfully until well into the 1930s: Ernst Mayr went to New Guinea in 1928, Gerd Heinrich to Celebes (today's Sulawesi) in 1930, Georg Stein to western New Guinea, Samba and Timor in 1931, and they were all followed later by other young scientists. This generated a huge surge in publications of Stresemann's work; he tried to examine the new material and publish the results as quickly as possible.

The first part of *Aves* appeared in print in 1927. The publication was rewarded with a very positive echo from his colleagues in ornithology, which moved the author to increase his efforts to complete the manuscript. Now he could fall back on the results of the work done by his doctoral candidates. The diversity of assignments forced him during this time to remain in the museum till late evening in order to work on the book; he also used holidays at home to make progress. Fatigue or unwillingness to work could not keep him away from his desk: 'it was infernal work, but very exciting', he noted.

At the beginning of June 1930 during the 7th International Ornithological Congress in Amsterdam, Stresemann was proposed by Lord Rothschild to be President of the following Congress, to be held in Oxford four years later.

The *Aves* manuscript was not yet completed, but Stresemann was already on the lookout for new horizons for his activities. He wrote to Ernst Mayr, who had been one of his doctoral candidates and now worked in New York, a student turned friend (30.9.1932): 'The future undoubtedly belongs to anatomical-physiological studies. The time of systematics based on skins is on the wane [....] We must lead the way on new paths instead of doing the work of epigones'. By that time Stresemann had described about 20 new species and more than 200 subspecies of birds.

The period of the Weimar Republic was the time of Stresemann's best work. Until 1933 around 300 works by him and ten dissertations under his supervision had been published. He was appointed Professor in 1930. New

doctoral candidates and colleagues flocked to him. Experts, among them illustrious guests, from within the country and abroad visited the museum either to do research there or to obtain advice. Stresemann expanded his discipline in an unprecedented manner into other areas of research: functional anatomy, histology, physiology, embryology, evolution (mutation studies), behaviour, ecology, theoretical biology, even extending to the history of ornithology. All fields of biological knowledge were now integrated into ornithology.

Thus ornithology, which had traditionally dealt with faunistics, systematics and morphology, and was often dismissed as a 'hobby science', achieved equal footing as a modern discipline within the biological sciences (Haffer 2001).

However yet again the political situation in the country cast a shadow over these scientific successes. The democratic essence of the Republic fell increasingly under the pressure of movements from both the extreme left and right. At the beginning of the 1930s the National Socialist excesses increased, until the party founded by Adolf Hitler surged to power in 1933. It was clear to Stresemann then that the political trend could not benefit the country. He wrote to his friend Mayr in America (14.3.1932): 'The Hitler experiments would have completely ruined us within a short time...'. He was happy, therefore, when the conservative Paul von Hindenburg was elected President of the Republic.

Stresemann was not the only one to be surprised by the political events at the beginning of the year 1933, when Hitler was made Chancellor and announced the creation of the Third Reich [the Third Empire]. He refused to accept it, as he did not believe in the permanence of the new politics, and wrote to Mayr at the end of May 1933: '...everything [will] soon enter calmer waters'. However it rapidly became clear that a dictatorship had been established in Germany. Signs of this new development were soon visible, even in his own ornithological department, when the doctoral candidates appeared in the uniforms of the SA, SS, NSKK and others. Initially though the atmosphere remained liberal, one could even tell political jokes about the new rulers without fear of punishment. But that was to change very soon. Stresemann was requested to appear at a meeting of writers and editors (as editor of the *Journal für Ornithologie*), at which Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels explained the new guidelines regarding publishing, pointing to the powerful methods he could employ to prevent any attempt at dissent. A further episode demonstrated to Stresemann what these methods could be. In the spring of 1934, during a routine ornithological excursion with his doctoral candidates northwest of Berlin, the group discovered a 'preventive detention camp' with prisoners