



DR. ERNST HARTERT
1859-1933.

Obituary.

ERNST JOHANN OTTO HARTERT. 1859-1933.

It was with deep regret that we briefly announced in our last number the death of Dr. Hartert in Berlin. This took place on the 11th (not the 10th as stated) of November, 1933, after an illness of less than three days.

Ernst Johann Otto Hartert, to give him his full name, was born on October 29th, 1859, at Hamburg, where his father, General Hartert, was then living. When his father was appointed Kommandant of Pillau in East Prussia, Ernst Hartert accompanied him, and the egg-collection which he made in his school days in Schlesien was greatly increased by his work near this place and Königsberg. Later he learned the preparation of skins from Künow, and explored the Kurische Haff district and near Memel, while in 1882 and 1884 he spent three or four months in the marshes and heaths of Masurenland. He began to write about his observations in 1880-1, and in 1887 his first important work on the bird life of Prussia appeared in the Austrian periodical *Die Schwalbe*, where 274 species were recorded (a later summary was published in the *Ibis*, 1892).

In April, 1885, when he was twenty-five years old, he started on his first collecting trip abroad, and explored the Niger and Benue Basins, travelling from Loko to Benue, and thence to Kano and Sokoto and back to the Benue, then by the river from Loko to Lokoja and Lagos. Returning to Europe via Sierra Leone, he reached Hamburg on August 29th, 1886, after an absence of one year and four months.

His second journey was begun on August 21st, 1887, when he left for Penang and crossed thence to Sumatra, collecting chiefly near Deli. From Sumatra he crossed over again to Penang and Perak. At Penang he met Doherty (this was in 1888) and they travelled together to Calcutta. He had intended to go on to Tibet, but when fighting broke out in Sikkim he made his way with Doherty to Assam and the Naga Hills instead. By the end of November he returned, but before reaching Calcutta visited Darjiling and then crossed India to Bombay, returning to Europe via Aden. The chief aim of the first part of this journey was to collect insects, but a number of interesting birds and notes on them were also obtained (see *Journal für Ornithologie*, 1889).

On his return to Germany he made a catalogue of the Senckenberg Collection at Frankfurt A/M, this being published in 1891. In that year he was married and came to London to work at Swifts and Goatsuckers for Vol. XVI. of the *Catalogue of the Birds of the British Museum*, which was published in 1892.

On May 1st, 1892, he left England with Mrs. Hartert for a collecting trip to St. Thomas, Puerto Rico and Venezuela, but owing to disturbed conditions in Venezuela most of the time was spent in the Dutch islands of Curaçao, Aruba and Bonaire. He contributed a paper to *The Ibis* (1893) on the birds of these islands, and subsequently wrote a fuller account of this and his other expeditions in "Aus den Wanderjahren eines Naturforschers" (*Novitates Zoologicae*, 1901 and 1902).

Returning to England in September, 1892, he took up the appointment of Director of the Museum at Tring, which the present Lord Rothschild had offered him. From this date Hartert gave up the idea of making other very long expeditions, and devoted himself for the next thirty-eight years (until his retirement in May, 1930) to systematic work and the building up of that wonderful collection of birds with which his name will always be associated.

During this period he made a number of shorter collecting trips, such as to the Channel Islands, Pyrenees, Engadine, Madeira and Canary Islands, while in 1908 he and Lord Rothschild began a systematic exploration of Algeria. Hartert visited this country six times between 1908 and 1920, including a long desert journey by camel in 1912 to In-Salah, a part of the Sahara which had not before been visited by a zoologist. In 1922 he went to Cyrenaica, and subsequently he made three trips (the last in 1930) to Marocco, which country he had first visited in 1901. In this way he became personally familiar with the avifauna of Africa Minor, and the Tring Museum became famous for its collection of birds from that region, and Hartert for his intimate knowledge of them. A number of papers on the subject are to be found in *Novitates Zoologicae*, the organ of the Tring Museum, some written jointly with Lord Rothschild on Algeria and one with Jourdain on Marocco, while two on the same country appear in the *Bulletin de la Société des Sciences Naturelles du Maroc*.

Hartert probably knew more birds of the world than any other ornithologist, but with this wide acquaintance was combined a remarkably intimate knowledge of the birds of certain regions often very remote from each other. Besides

his close study of the avifauna of N.W. Africa, he devoted special attention for many years to the birds of the East Indian archipelago, parts of which he had visited earlier in life. Numerous collections made in these islands came to Tring and were worked out by Hartert, as his many papers in *Novitates Zoologicae*, as well as his descriptions in the *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, will bear witness.

He will, however, be best remembered for his prolonged and intensive study of the birds of the great Palæarctic Region and his monumental work, *Die Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna*, on the subject. Although he did so much besides, undoubtedly this work, and the building up with the active assistance of Lord Rothschild, of the wonderful collection of bird skins from all over the world at Tring, were the main tasks of his life. The book was dependent to a large extent on the collection and was based mainly on the fine series of Palæarctic birds which was gradually brought together. In this connexion the acquisition of the Brehm Collection in 1897, and Hartert's critical study of it, formed a basis of the utmost importance, as at that time little progress could be made in European systematic work before discovering which of the multitude of names proposed by Brehm could be employed.

Hartert's great work was issued in parts, which commenced in November, 1903, publication being suspended between October, 1914, and March, 1920, and was completed in 1922. In 1923 he published a *Nachtrag*, which, in 1932, was superseded by an *Ergänzungsband*, of which two parts have appeared. In the latter he was assisted by Professor Steinbacher, who, it is hoped, will complete it.

Hartert's systematic work was based on the recognition of geographical forms and the use of trinomials, while in nomenclature he adopted the International rules of 1891 involving strict priority dating from the 10th (1758), instead of the 12th (1766), edition of Linnæus's *Systema*. His views met with great opposition from most of the older ornithologists of Europe at the time, and in England this was brought to a head by the publication in 1912 of the *Hand-List of British Birds*, in which Hartert was responsible for the classification and nomenclature employed. Hartert's sound work, his sincerity and constant advocacy of this system, which was the most practical yet devised and expressed the true relationship of nearly allied birds, won many adherents, while the opposition gradually died down, so that by the time

the *Practical Handbook of British Birds* appeared (1919-24), with Hartert as specialist in nomenclature and classification, the system had become generally adopted. The importance of his work and influence in effecting this change of opinion in Europe, and thus enabling ornithologists all over the world to work on the same system, cannot be overestimated.

So far as British ornithologists were concerned he not only demonstrated the value of this system, but by comparative study showed us that a number of our birds could be clearly distinguished from those of the same species on the continent, and himself described and named eighteen of these geographical forms.

Of other special British work mention may be made of his account with Lord Rothschild of the birds of Buckinghamshire in the *Victoria History*, and the later and fuller account, with Jourdain, of the same county, and the Tring reservoirs (*Nov. Zool.*, 1920).

Although Hartert wrote chiefly in the Tring publication, *Novitates Zoologicae*, and the *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, as well as occasionally in the *Ibis* and the *Journal für Ornithologie*, he contributed to many other publications, and also wrote sections of such works as *Genera Avium* and *Das Tierreich*. One of his most important pieces of work which must be specially mentioned, was the series of critical articles in *Novitates Zoologicae* on the types of birds in the Tring collection.

He described as new a very large number of birds and his name is perpetuated in many which were named after him by others.

Hartert was elected a member of the British Ornithologists' Union in 1893 and then joined the B.O. Club, though he had already attended some of its earliest meetings (it was founded in October, 1892) as a guest. Subsequently for nearly forty years he was a very constant attendant at the meetings of the Club, and usually had some interesting birds to exhibit and remarks to make. He was elected a Corresponding Fellow in 1891, and an Honorary Fellow in 1902, of the American Ornithologists' Union.

To commemorate his seventieth birthday, October 29th, 1929, a *Festschrift*, to which ornithologists all over the world contributed papers, was published in Germany, while the British Ornithologists' Union presented him with the Godman-Salvin Gold Medal. In 1930 he severed his long connexion with the Tring Museum, and, returning to Germany, settled

in Berlin. Although he had nominally retired he never ceased to study birds, and the use of a room being given to him in the Berlin Museum, he worked there regularly until within two or three days of his death. In 1933 he was made an Extraordinary Member of the B.O.U., and in the same year an Honorary President of the German Ornithological Society, honours which he greatly appreciated.

Hartert had considerable knowledge of other branches of natural science (he collected and studied, for instance, beetles of the genus *Carabus* for many years), but he made systematic ornithology his aim in life, and his unceasing labours have given us the necessary foundation of a very carefully considered account of the differences and ranges of Palæarctic birds, upon which present-day and future ornithologists can safely build up biological facts. He was always intensely keen and sincere and invariably ready with help and advice. He had a very interesting personality, made the more engaging by his accent and certain German characteristics, which he never lost though he lived here so many years. He became naturalized soon after his appointment at Tring.

During the war when his best friends were opposed to each other, and his only son, having joined the British Army, was killed in action, Hartert's position was one of great difficulty courageously faced. After the war his insistent urgings that science should have no regard for politics resulted in the revival of the International Ornithological Congresses, and it was fitting that he should be president of the first post-war Congress at Copenhagen in 1926.

Hartert's retirement in 1930 and then the sale of the great Tring collection of birds in 1932, made gaps never likely to be filled, and now the death of this great master of systematic ornithology closes a chapter of great importance in the history of the science.

H.F.W. and F.C.R.J.