

Obituary

Erwin Friedrich Theodor Stresemann, DR PHIL (1889-1972)

Looking back over more than half a lifetime, I recollect the international ornithological scene being increasingly dominated by the debonair figure of my near-contemporary, Erwin Stresemann of the museum at Berlin. I first met him at the VII International Ornithological Congress at Amsterdam in 1930, when he read a keynote paper on the anatomy and physiology of birds. He was currently (1927-34) publishing one of the great technical bibles of our subject, the volume on 'Aves' in the *Handbuch der Zoologie* (volume 7, part 2) edited by Kükenthal and Krumbach. He was at that meeting elected as the next international president.

So at the VIII Congress at Oxford in 1934 he was our president at the early age of 44—and there was dancing in the hall of Exeter College, to the music of the Coldstream Guards, for the first time (it was said) for six hundred years. In his address, he reviewed the ornithological events of the half-century since the first international meeting in Vienna in 1884. Although his interests were by no means confined to the museum, he was primarily a systematist, and I have no competence to assess his contribution in that special sphere. I think of him, however, as having a particular interest in Indonesia and in the flycatchers there which make it so difficult to determine a familial separation between that group and the warblers. During 1939-41 he published (in the *Journal für Ornithologie*) a big zoogeographical paper on the birds of the Celebes; much later, in 1964, he was joint author of the article 'FLYCATCHER (1)' in *A New Dictionary of Birds*.

After the second world war he was again an active and authoritative participant in international ornithological gatherings and affairs. In 1951 he published a book on the development of the subject since the time of Aristotle (*Die Entwicklung der Ornithologie von Aristoteles bis zur Gegenwart*, Berlin). He attended all of the resumed series of congresses from 1950 onwards. In July 1972 he was an honoured guest, with his wife, at the royal opening of the new ornithological building of the British Museum (Natural History) at Tring.

He was born at Dresden on 22nd November 1889. His doctorate was of Munich, his professorship was of the Humboldt University in

Berlin, and for many years he was director of the Zoological Museum there. He had been president of the Deutsche Ornithologen Gesellschaft; and he had edited the *Journal für Ornithologie* (for forty years) and the *Zoologische Jahrbücher (Syst.)*. He had been an honorary member of the British Ornithologists' Union from 1929, and he had received many other marks of recognition.

He spoke English and other languages with facility, and was adept in exposition and in the conduct of meetings. Socially he was gay, with a keen sense of humour; his monocle and a sometimes sardonic manner were characteristic. He was generous in placing his wide knowledge at the disposal of others. Certain young British ornithologists, while prisoners of war in Germany, had reason to be grateful for his kindly interest.

In his later years he had turned to a study of the order of moult in the wing quills in different groups. This led to a series of papers in collaboration with his wife, Vesta, to whom our sympathy in her loss must now be extended. She has herself described his life as richly filled—a fitting epitaph for a great ornithologist. He died on 20th November 1972, just short of his 83rd birthday.

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