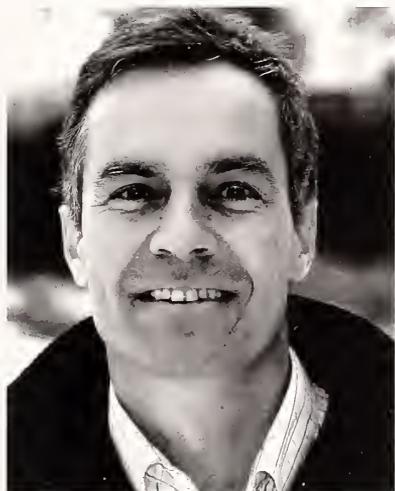


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Andreas Helbig (28.07.1957 – 19.10.2005)



Prof. Dr. Andreas Helbig, member of the advisory board of *Bonner zoologische Beiträge*, died on 19 October 2005, at the age of only 48. He leaves a wife and two sons. His early death is a great loss not only to his family but to the scientific community, as he was a leading figure in avian science in Europe.



Andreas Helbig was an ornithologist with heart and soul. His interests in birdlife were broad, extending from bird-watching to molecular science and taxonomy, comprising field ornithology, bird migration, orientation and, more recently, molecular phylogeny and population genetics of birds. His merits are in his molecular phylogenetic publications, especially on *Sylvia* warblers, but also on birds of prey, shearwaters, gulls and other bird groups. One of his last projects was: The Herring Gull complex as a model group for recent holarctic vertebrate radiations.

His interests in birds date back to his school days in Enger, Kreis Herford, where Andreas Helbig published his first papers on observations of rare birds. From 1979 onwards he studied Biology at the University of Bielefeld, San Diego State University in California and received his Diploma on “Zugrichtung tagsüber ziehender Vögel am Teutoburger Wald, NW-Deutschland” [Migration routes of diurnal travelling birds in the Teutoburg woods, NW-Germany] at the J.W. Goethe-University in Frankfurt in 1983. After a break due to his alternative civilian service in the “Europareservat Dümmer” he continued his studies in Frankfurt. His dissertation on “Angeborene Zugrichtungen nachts ziehender Singvögel: Orientierungsmechanismen, geographische Variation und Vererbung” [Inborn migration routes of

night travelling passerines: orientation mechanisms, geographic variation and inheritance] was awarded best dissertation of the year 1989. In order to learn techniques and methods for the application of molecular markers he spent several months at Queens University in Kingston (Canada), funded by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. For a short period Andreas Helbig continued his studies on inborn orientation mechanisms in the Blackcap, *Sylvia atricapilla*, as a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology, Radolfzell. Until 1993 he held a Postdoctoral position at the Institute of Pharmaceutical Biology, Heidelberg, financed by the German Research Foundation (DFG). From this period onwards Andreas Helbig focussed his research on molecular phylogenetics. Ornithological systematics, species concepts and those species-complexes at the transition between subspecies and species attracted his special interest. From July 1993 until his sudden and unexpected death he held the position as director of the “Vogelwarte Hiddensee” [Bird ringing center Hiddensee] at the Zoological Institute of the Ernst-Moritz-Arndt University of Greifswald. Besides his activities at the ringing station he taught “Evolution and Phylogenetics” and “Ornithology”. With his habilitation on “Molekulare Phylogenie, Systematik und Evolution der Zweigsänger (Aves, Sylviidae)” [Molecular phylogeny, systematics and evolution of Old World Warblers (Aves, Sylviidae) in 1997 he advanced to the leading expert on avian molecular systematics over broad areas of Europe. The German Ornithologists’ Society (DO-G) awarded his research with the “Stresemann-Förderung” in the same year.

Besides his duties as director of the Institute and teacher, Andreas Helbig was active in several other fields: He was also chairman of the Scientific Committee of the DO-G, Secretary General of the European Ornithologists’ Union for five years, joined the TSC (= Taxonomic Sub-committee (TSC) of the British Ornithologists’ Union, BOU), and was well-known as a member of the German Rarities Committee for about 20 years. As editor, subject editor or member of the editorial board, he contributed to the scientific quality of several journals; e.g., “Vogelwelt – Beiträge zur Vogelkunde”, “Journal of Ornithology”, “Berichte aus der Vogelwarte Hiddensee”, “Limicola”, and “Journal of Evolutionary Biology”.

Andreas Helbig also kept contact with our Research Museum. He was on the advisory board of our institu-

tional journal "Bonner zoologische Beiträge". He was invited speaker at the Second European Symposium on Bird Collections in November 2001 and at the 44th Phylogenetisches Symposium on adaptive radiations in 2002. The presentation of his research project on radiation in the Herring Gull complex (*Larus argentatus*-complex) by his wife, Dorit Liebers-Helbig, had to be delayed until February 2006.

I still remember the circumstances when I met Andreas Helbig for the first time. It was during the Pan African Ornithological Congress in Nairobi 1988, when everybody was spending his or her spare time in Nairobi

National Park for bird-watching. Provided with the intimate knowledge of local ornithologists where to spot rare birds, we easily arrived at the best places – always to find Andreas Helbig already there. This episode exemplifies his attitude towards all fields of ornithology – his alert interest in any actual and novel event concerning birds, as well as his competency of recognizing these. His passing leaves a great gap in avian science.

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