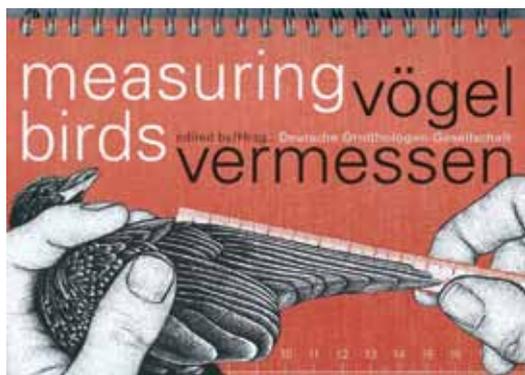


Book Reviews

Measuring Birds – Vögel Vermessen by S. Eck, J. Fiebig, W. Fiedler, I. Heynen, B. Nicolai, T. Töpfer, R. van den Elzen, R. Winkler & F. Woog. Deutsche Ornithologen-Gesellschaft, Wilhelmshaven. 118 pages. ISBN 978-3-923757-05-3. Available at €24.90 from www.media-natur.de.



The measuring of caught birds and classification of categorical traits are common practices in ornithological studies. Despite several manuals or guide books describing measurement methods (e.g.

Bairlein 1995, Baker 1993, Busse 2000, de Beer *et al.* 2001, Hull & Bloom 2001, Redfern & Clark 2001, Svensson 1992), we are still far from agreement on common standards, even within the same group of birds. Thus, any move towards standardisation of measurement sets or comparative analyses of usefulness of particular measurements is valuable. The title of the book, *Measuring Birds*, strongly suggests that this publication is right in the middle of the subject. Pocket format (18.7 × 13.3 cm) of wire-O bound notebook style and printed on durable water-resistant paper allow it to be used in any field conditions. Although *Measuring Birds* is designed as a book for assisting ringers in the field, it may also play the role of a guide book stored in a library. Moreover, this book is written in two languages and on each page English and German texts are situated side by side.

Although the authors claim that they did not want to create standard measuring methods or make recommendations for using certain measurements, they discuss in detail only five measurements and two scoring methods that come from the standard protocol of ringing stations working within the European–African Songbird Migration Network. On the other hand, providing full descriptions of all measurements shown in this book would increase its size dramatically and the idea of having a kind of ringers' pocket-sized crib-sheet would disappear altogether.

The book begins with a list of equipment needed for bird measuring with additional useful comments. Basic topics, like accuracy and reliability of measurements, comparison of measurements on fresh and dried specimens, numbering of flight feathers and wing geometry (wing formula) are discussed in subsequent chapters. These are followed by the description of the five measurements and two scoring methods mentioned above, which are commonly used at bird ringing stations, as well as the recording of skull ossification, which is an important ageing criterion for passerines.

The authors describe over 70 different measurements and methods of assessing flight muscle and fat score. Besides well-known and widely-used measurement methods, the book describes their variants. For example, there are six different measurements of bill-length, six of bill-depth, six of wing-length and five of tail-length. The measurements described cover the vast majority of recent methods and only a few are missing; for example the book does not mention two techniques for measuring the bill lengths of ducks (Byers & Cary 1991), the length of head crests (important for sexing Northern Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus*), or categories for recording primary wear. Nevertheless the coverage of different methods is almost complete; therefore this little book is one of the most comprehensive sources of knowledge about the various body measurements used in ornithology.

Recommended measurements are clearly identified and in many cases references to literature sources with more detailed descriptions are provided. Attractive illustrations by Nils Hoff are helpful for understanding the best way of holding a bird for taking certain measurements.

Clearly *Measuring Birds* is not only useful for field ornithologists, but also for those who work on museum specimens. Thus among measurements that are difficult to take on live birds we can find details of total body length, wing span and half wing span.

The most significant omission from the book is the lack of any description of methods for scoring moult; however this is easy to find in the literature (e.g. Baker 1993, Busse 2000, de Beer *et al.* 2001). Nowadays recording the moult scores of primaries, and sometimes secondaries and tertiaries, is often standard practice during ringing operations (e.g. de Beer *et al.* 2001). Therefore it is a pity that the standard moult scoring system developed by Ashmole (1962) is not mentioned in *Measuring Birds*. Similarly it would have been valuable to include a description of methods for recording the progress and intensity of body feather moult, as these are in widespread use (e.g. Howell *et al.* 2003, McKnight & Hepp 1999, Meissner *et al.* 2012, Petrie 1998).

I have no doubt that *Measuring Birds* is a valuable publication and can recommend it not only for ornithologists working within the European–African Songbird Migration Network, but also for wader researchers.

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