



170 years Journal of Ornithology (formerly Journal für Ornithologie)

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The Journal of Ornithology (JORN; prior to 2004 it was Journal für Ornithologie) is the oldest ornithological periodical in the world. The German Ornithological Society (DOG resp. DO-G) was established in 1845. Its first journal *Rhea*, was founded in 1846, and after some internal disputes, replaced in 1849 by *Naumannia*. Then, JORN was established in 1853 and in 1854 became the official journal of the DOG—and apart from an interruption in 1945–1951 due to the turmoil of the Second World War and the post-war period—has been published regularly and punctually since its first issue (Fig. 1).

The success of JORN is a result of its modernity and originality that have been evident since its inception. Jean Cabanis (1816–1906), the bird curator of the Berlin Natural History Museum, deemed *Naumannia*, that was then official organ of the DOG, excruciatingly narrow: “it does not meet the requirements of modern science” (Stresemann 1927). Writing to Eduard Baldamus (1812–1893), editor of *Naumannia*, who limited its content to the systematics and faunistics of European birds, he said: “*Naumannia* suffers from the same disease as the DOG ... It is too strongly German and therefore only intended for a smallish circle” (letter 16.05.1852; Stresemann 1957). Fortunately, the 36-year-old dynamic and internationally oriented Cabanis prevailed over Baldamus and his conservative ideas, and led to the formation of the JORN (Fig. 2).

In the first issue of JORN in January 1853, in the “Prospectus” (today we would call it an editorial), Cabanis urged authors from the “entire ornithological world” to collaborate to make the journal “a real central organ.” He encouraged contributions from the whole of ornithology,

including paleontology, zootomy [i.e., functional anatomy], physiology, systematics and oology as well the life histories of individual species. In addition, he included literature reviews and new items. With such broad-ranging, forward-directed aspirations, Cabanis aspired to shape not only his journal (the JORN remained in his sole ownership until he retired in 1893), but also the DOG. He wrote in 1852: “A powerful ornithological journal can form the crystallization nucleus around which a lively ornithological life will be established” (Stresemann 1927). Cabanis achieved his goal, for the JORN, the flagship of the DOG, has consistently maintained its open-minded standards and is one of just a handful of influential ornithological journals.

The first volume comprised six issues with a total of 458 pages. The papers came from a suite of ornithological celebrities, including C. L. Brehm, L. Reichenbach, C. Gloger, G. Hartlaub, C. Bruch, L. Martin, J. W. von Müller, and J. Kaup. A lithograph of Pallas’s Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus* came from the hand of the famous, but at that time already aged J. F. Naumann himself. The papers covered topics such as species definition, taxonomy, comparative morphology, molt, brood parasitism and the ovary of the cuckoo, hybridization, and the ornithogeography of Africa. These were novel themes given that Darwin’s ground-breaking concept of natural selection was not published until six years later, in 1859.

Cabanis edited the JORN for more than 41 years; too long, perhaps, since toward the end of his editorship, his strength waned. He was succeeded by his son-in-law, Anton Reichenow (1847–1941), who was also his successor as curator of the Berlin bird collection. Between 1894 and 1921 Reichenow edited JORN efficiently and safely. The end of Reichenow’s reign marked the beginning of a new era, when the brilliant 32-year-old Erwin Stresemann (1889–1972) was offered the position of Reichenow’s successor as curator at the Berlin Museum—the most prestigious position in German ornithology—and thus also the editorship of the JORN. With his head full of ambitious plans, Stresemann directed the JORN’s fortunes for the next forty years (1922–1961),

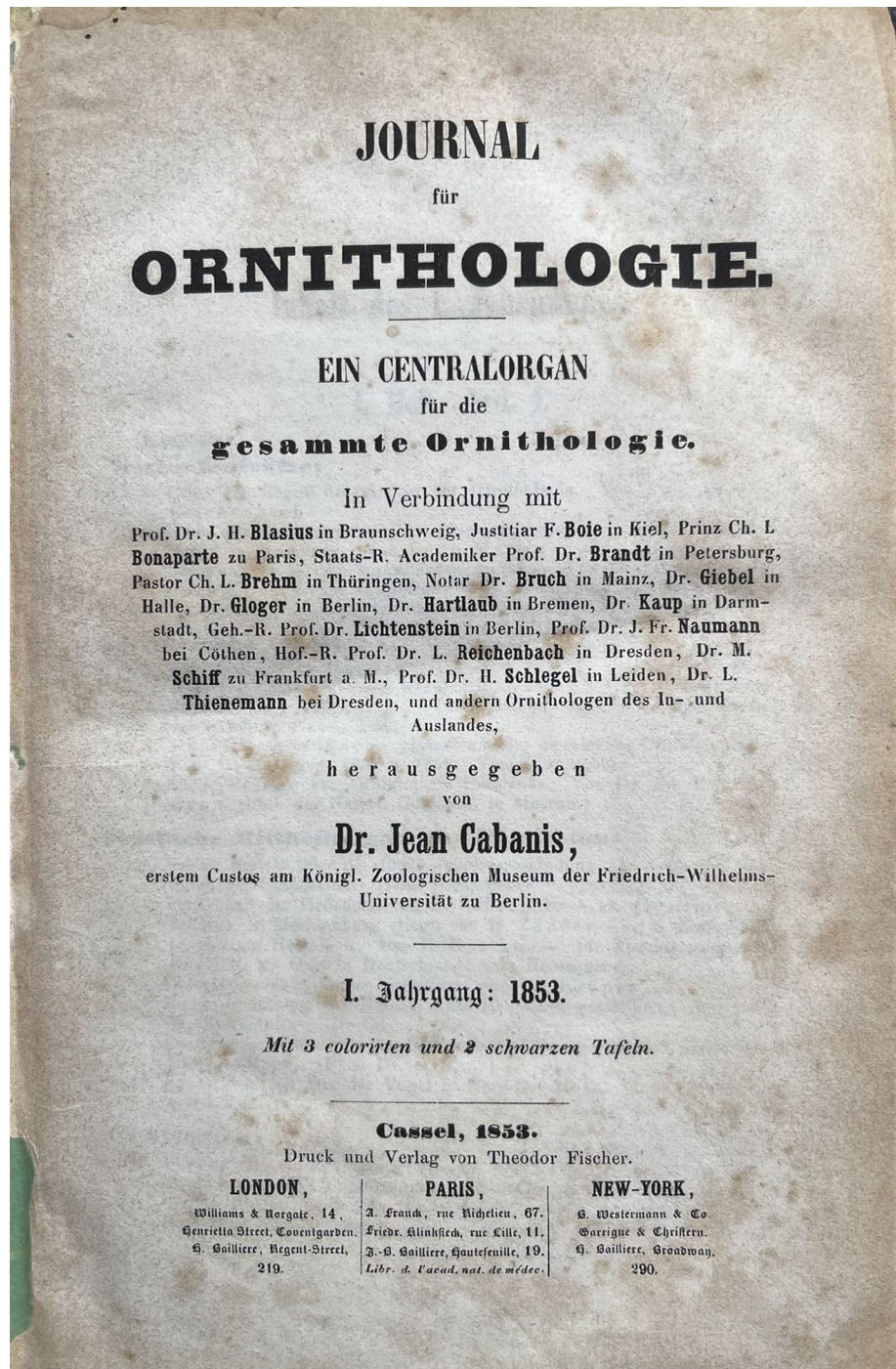
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Fig. 1 Cover page of the first issue of Journal für Ornithologie (today Journal of Ornithology)



through scientifically innovative, but economically and politically turbulent times.

To the astonishment of many, Stresemann, who was still a student then, received in 1914 the commission from the Breslau zoologist Wilhelm Kükenhal (1861–1922) to cover the class of Aves for his renowned multi-volume handbook of zoology (Stresemann 1927; Haffer 1994). This project became Stresemann's most important mission until the 1930s. His aim was to create an overview

of the entire spectrum of ornithology, devoting space to previously underrepresented fields such as functional morphology, genetics, physiology, life history, behavior, orientation, and evolutionary biology. Stresemann's *Aves* thus ended the purely descriptive period of ornithology (Mayr 1969) and initiated its transformation into a branch of modern biological science, in which birds are used as models for many general questions.

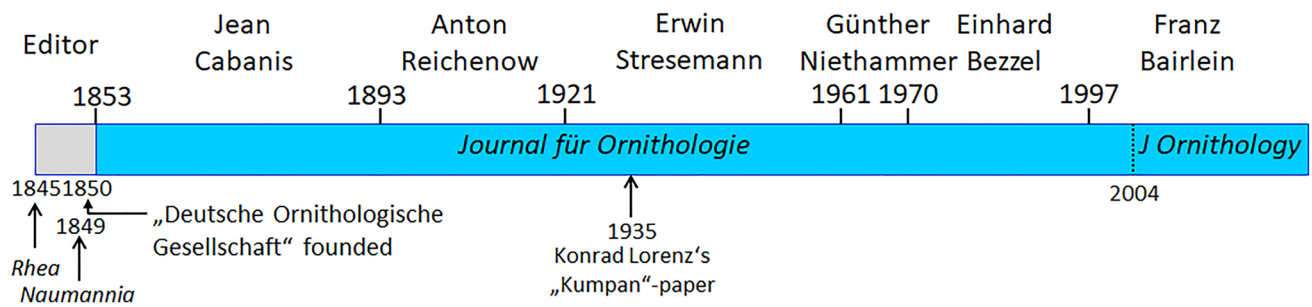


Fig. 2 Timeline “170 years Journal of Ornithology”

In Central Europe, Stresemann’s *Aves* became the founding document of modern ornithology and his concept of the New Avian Biology quickly spread in the 1930s, especially in North America. Reviewing Stresemann’s many achievements, Haffer (1994, 2001) referred to his work as resulting in “a revolution.” Stresemann made the JORN a platform for modern ornithology. Each issue of the JORN exposed ornithologists to new topics, some of which were decidedly avant-garde. One of these was Konrad Lorenz’s 200-page “Kumpan-paper” (Lorenz 1935) that many readers considered a step too far, and some resigned from the DOG because of it. Lorenz’s “difficult” and verbose Kumpan-paper has since been regarded as the founding manifesto for the field of comparative behavioral biology (Birkhead and Schulze-Hagen, in prep.). Another sensational contribution was Margret Morse Nice’s paper on the life history of the song sparrow *Melospiza melodia* (Nice 1933, 1934), for which there was apparently no space in the *Auk* at the time. In less than ten years, Stresemann transformed the JORN into “the leading ornithological journal ... which could well compete with the best zoological journals in the world” (Mayr 1969).

Stresemann was a workaholic and the editorship of the JORN, essentially a one-man enterprise. Such was the journal’s status, that the publication of a paper there opened up a scientific career for several young ornithologists. Stresemann was a superb editor, able to immediately recognize the potential of a manuscript and was not above “smashing it into a thousand pieces and building a new one out of the fragments” if necessary (Haffer et al. 2000), for the good of both the young author and the journal. Of course, the editor read all the galley proofs himself. When he was drafted into the military during World War II and hardly anything worked anymore, Stresemann motivated his then 11-year-old, highly intelligent stepdaughter Amélie Hauchecorne (later Koehler) to check the proofs, which she did with care and enthusiasm.

After the Second World War and the political division of Germany, Stresemann, who was permitted to switch back and forth between West and East Berlin as a registered “border crosser”, was the guarantor that the JORN could be

obtained and read in both political systems. He and his journal had become synonymous. When the time came for him to hand over the editorship to younger hands, he wrote to Ernst Mayr saying that the JORN “is now my pampered lap child and it is difficult for me to hand it over to stepparents” (Haffer et al. 2000). The 100th anniversary of the JORN, in 1953, had been forgotten by the DOG in its sober practicality, but not by the American Ornithologists’ Union, whose president Josselyn van Tyne wrote to Stresemann to “to tell you how much we admire the high scholarly standards of the *Journal*” (Deutsche Ornithologen-Gesellschaft 1954).

Marking the end of the long-lasting and fruitful personal union of the curator of birds at the Berlin Museum and editor of the JORN on behalf of the DOG, Stresemann’s successor was Günther Niethammer (1908–1974). He was curator at the Alexander Koenig Research Museum in Bonn, became co-editor in 1956 and edited the JORN from 1962 to 1970. Einhard Bezzel (1934–2022) took over the position of editor in 1971. He led the JORN with diligence and continued to maintain its high standards until 1997. The great advances in the natural sciences made during his time are reflected in a number of contributions (many of them international), including influential papers by W. Wiltschko, E. Gwinner, P. Berthold, F. Bairlein, A. Helbig, and many others. Franz Bairlein has been the editor of the JORN since 1998 and has shaped and modernized the journal in many ways. For the first time in its history, the journal has been published in cooperation with a publishing house, Blackwell Wissenschafts-Verlag, Berlin. It steadily increased the number of papers in English, and in 2004 the journal became an entirely English journal. Subsequently, a collaboration with Springer Nature facilitated its publication, resulting in a much wider international outreach. Furthermore, the journal embraced a geographic diversification strategy by appointing Editors dedicated to specific regions, thus amplifying its global recognition, as well as, the introduction of Subject Editors, allowing JORN to sustain its commitment to diverse ornithological topics. Recently, JORN signals its progressive journey toward augmenting Open Access content by becoming a Transformative Journal. This endeavor aims to

gradually augment the availability of Open Access content toward a fully Open Access model in the in the near future.

In 1927 Erwin Stresemann confirmed Jean Cabanis's early motto of 1852: "May our Journal continue to form the crystallization nucleus of a vivacious ornithological life and remain a focus for studies of lasting value to science." That sentiment remains as true today as it did a century ago.

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