# The Finnish Ornithological Society 1924—1974

LARS VON HAARTMAN

VON HAARTMAN, L. [Zool. Dept., Univ. of Helsinki, P. Rautatiekatu 13, SF-00100 Helsinki 10, Finland] 1974. — *The Finnish Ornithological Society 1924—1974.* Ornis Fenn. 51:1—9.
A brief sketch of the history of the quinquagenarian Society is given.

This year Finnish ornithology celebrates two anniversaries. Fifty years have passed since the Finnish Ornithological Society was founded, and one hundred years since scientific ornithology came into being in the country.

On May 9, 1874, Johan Axel Palmén publicly defended his doctoral thesis "Om foglarnes flyttningsvägar" ( = On the migratory pathways of birds). Palmén was the first zoologist in Finland whose doctorate was awarded for work on an ornithological subject. Two years later his thesis appeared in an enlarged German version (Über die Zugstrassen der Vögel, 1876). This work, and the sharp polemics it aroused with the well-known German ornithologist von Homeyer, quickly made the young Doctor of Philosophy famous, and at the age of 38 he was appointed Professor of Zoology at the University of Helsinki. Although subsequently Palmén's own work was mainly to be concerned with comparative morphology (the tracheal system and genital ducts of insects) he had an immense influence upon ornithology in Finland, especially through the advice he gave to young ornithologists.[1] Carl Finnilä, Hugo Krank, Justus Montell, Ludvig Munsterhjelm, Elis Nordling, Rolf Palmgren, J. Albert Sandman and E. W. Suomalainen (mainly publishing between 1898 and 1918) were all, in a way, the spiritual heirs of Palmén, although many of them were amateurs. The main achievements of this period were local faunae, covering different parts of the country, with a certain predilection for Lapland, which was then little known and besides was an Eldorado for egg collectors. The main subject of these local faunae was the occurrence, abundance, breeding biology and migratory habits of the different species, but also, as a result of Palmén's influence, the composition of the bird communities of different habitats. Here was a nucleus of future ecological work in birds. Thanks to the information, usually both reliable and detailed, set down in these local faunae, we can today form a rough picture of the changes in the bird fauna of Finland in the last hundred years.

Though Palmén was the first Finnish ornithologist to attain an international reputation, ornithology existed in the country before him. The men mainly responsible for the preliminary ornithological survey of Finland were the brothers von Wright, Magnus (1805—1868), Wilhelm (1810—1887,

[1] Palmén published a programme for Finnish ornithological work: Internationellt ornitologiskt samarbete och Finlands andel deri. — Meddel. Soc. Fauna Flora Fenn. 11, 1885.

mainly living in Sweden), and Ferdinand (1822—1906). They were animal and landscape painters in a Biedermeyerish, very precise and detailed style, with an extraordinary skill at representing texture. The shiny green colour of the neck of the male Mallard in nuptial plumage in a von Wright picture is as thrilling as the silk dress of a young girl as depicted by a Dutch seventeenth century master like Ter Borch. Few bird painters are mentioned in Erwin Stresemann's Geschichte der Ornithologie (Berlin, 1951), but Magnus von Wright is among them. He was, in addition, a skilful taxidermist. The bird collection in the Zoological Museum of the University of Helsinki is mainly the outcome of his indefatigable diligence. He also wrote the first bird fauna of the Helsinki area (Notiser ur Sällskapets pro Fauna et Flora Fennica Förhandlingar I, 1848) and the first handbook of the birds of Finland (Bidrag till Finlands Naturkännedom 5, 1859), the second part of which was finished after his death by Palmén (Helsinki, 1873).

In 1918 Finland was granted independence after a civil war. Many learned societies were founded in the years to follow, among them the Finnish Ornithological Society. The founding meeting of the Society was held on January 18, 1924. The aim was at first to start an informal club, but the plans changed, and on March 22, 1924, the authorities accepted the statutes of the new Society.

Fifty years is both a long and a short period. It is a long period in science, as one usually assumes that the volume of knowledge is doubled in a decade. Not a few of the founder members of the Society are still alive, but it may well be that all the birds living in Finland 50 years ago are dead. In terms of the life-span of most small passerine birds (generally c. 50 per cent annual mortality among the adults) half a century means about as much as a thousand years to man.

A considerable part of the ornithological work carried out in Finland consists of bird censuses. Let us begin with a census of the members of the Finnish Ornithological Society. At the end of its first year, 1924, the new Society had 111 members. This population grew rapidly, and three years later consisted of about 300 members. Then, the number remained practically unchanged until the mid-thirties, after which we lose track of all detail in the dimness of history. In 1964 the members, if we include some foreign subscribers to Ornis Fennica, numbered approx. 600. In 1970 the number of native members had risen to 914.

The numbers attending the monthly meetings of the Society show a parallel trend (Fig. 1). The start was modest, with 20—30 participants. In 1936 and 1937 the average was no less than 46 and 45, respectively. During the Second World War the meetings were held irregularly and the number of participants sank to the original 20—30. Then, after 1945, the numbers increased steadily, reaching an extraordinary peak in 1963—65, but remaining high even after this.

At the demand of the members living outside the capital, spring meetings are held annually in different places. The first meeting of this kind took place on April 25—26, 1964 in Turku. The spring meetings usually consist of a day or an afternoon devoted to lectures, and another day devoted to excursions. In 1968 and 1970, instead of the usual spring meetings, the Finnish Ornithological Society held joint meetings with the Estonian ornithologists, on May 23—26, 1968 in Tallinn, and on May 16—19, 1970 in Helsinki.

On June 5—12, 1958 the 12th International Ornithological Congress was held in Helsinki. Before and after the Congress, excursions were arranged,

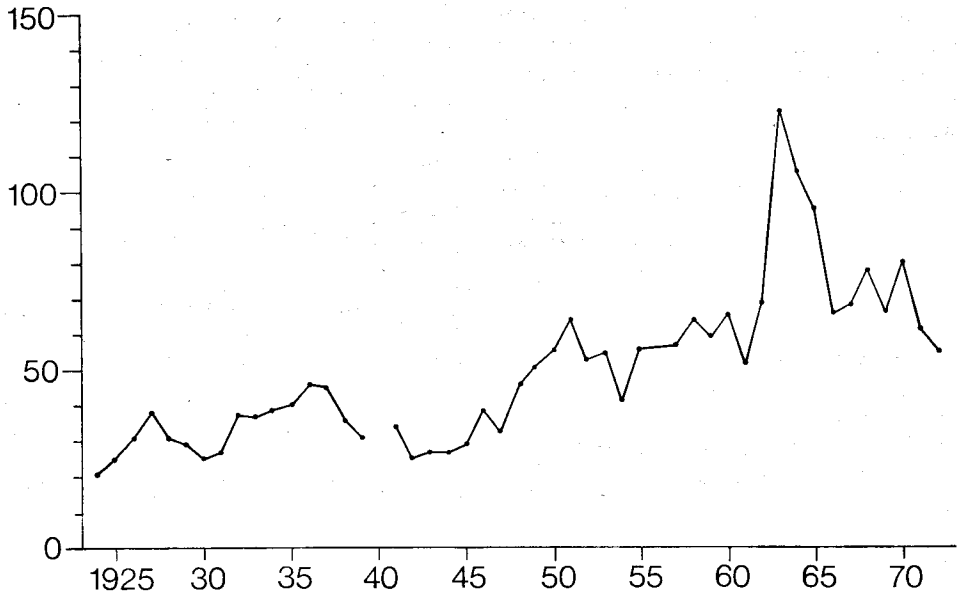


FIG. 1. Average number of persons attending the monthly meetings of the Finnish Ornithological Society.

mainly to eastern and northern Finland. The Congress in Helsinki was the first at which the participants were lodged in students' dormitories, which made it easy for them to meet and talk to colleagues. The Proceedings of the Congress filled two volumes and are the next largest published so far. The costs of the Congress were kept down by voluntary, unpaid work by a large group of ornithologists. Since then, congress fees and other unavoidable expenses have risen tremendously, making it more and more difficult for young people and people from poor countries to attend. The Congress was not formally arranged by the Finnish Ornithological Society, but its members played a decisive part in all preparations.

The most important and lasting result of the activity of the Society is its journal, Ornis Fennica. From the beginning the journal has appeared quarterly, though issues 3 and 4 have often been published as a double issue. Until 1967 the typography of the journal remained relatively unchanged, but from the beginning of that year it has been printed in two columns.

The quinquagenarian journal has undoubtedly become somewhat neater. I do not think that the map of the directions of bird migration on the Finnish coasts, published in Ornis Fennica 1925, p. 44, would be accepted by any editor today; it looks as if it had been forgotten in the author's pocket for quite a time.

The annual number of pages of Ornis Fennica (Fig. 2) has depended upon the worl-wide political and economic situation. Thus, during the depression after 1929, the size of the volumes shrank, and in the period 1940—49 reached its lowest level, the worst year being 1948. Since 1950 there has been a fairly steady increase. The years 1927 and 1928 saw the publication of two supplements of

Ornis Fennica, containing 239 and 199 pages, respectively. In 1965 the Society started to publish another, less pretentious journal, Lintumies (= The Birdwatcher). Lintumies failed to appear in 1972, but was published again in 1973, comprising more pages than before. It contains articles and short communications mainly on faunistics, especially rarities, and bird migration. Whereas Ornis Fennica is nowadays mainly published in English, Lintumies is published in Finnish.

The trends in Finnish ornithology are, to a certain extent, mirrored in Ornis Fennica, though we should remember that a considerable part of Finnish bird literature is published elsewhere, especially by the societies "Vanamo" and Societas pro Fauna et Flora Fennica. A picture of the subjects dealt with in Ornis Fennica was gained by dividing its articles into 14 groups:

1. Systematics, including measurements of birds taken in nature
2. Anatomy
3. Oology
4. Distribution, faunistics
5. Censuses
6. Breeding biology, including territory
7. Population problems, other than clutch-size
8. Food
9. Daily activity
10. General behaviour
11. Migration, irruptions, etc.
12. Physiology
13. Identification
14. Miscellaneous

Unfortunately, some of these groups are too heterogeneous (especially group 1). Articles belonging to two or more groups have been placed in the one considered to be most important. The proportions of articles in the different groups were calculated as percentages for five year periods. Sometimes the fluctuations in the percentages seem to have been due to chance. In other cases an unmistakable trend is visible.

Faunistics (Fig. 3) reached a maximum during and immediately after the Second World War, partly because the Finnish army had penetrated into Soviet Karelia, the fauna of which was little known. Recently, other problems have taken precedence. Besides, much of the faunistic information is now published in Lintumies.

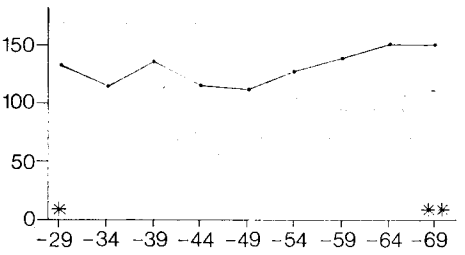


FIG. 2. The average annual numbers of pages of a volume of Ornis Fennica per pentade 1924—1969. One star indicates a period, during which the Society published two monographs, and two stars a period when another journal (Lintumies) was published in addition to Ornis Fennica.

Many of the founders of the Finnish Ornithological Society were egg collectors. No wonder that articles on birds' eggs were relatively numerous in the first volumes of Ornis Fennica (Fig. 4). Very soon, however, interest in oology waned. In over 30 years, Ornis Fennica did not contain a single article on the subject. When oology recently reappeared (1972, R. A. Väisänen, O. Hildén, M. Soikkeli & S. Vuolanto: Egg dimension variation in five wader species: The role of heredity) the eggs had been measured in nature, and the data were analysed with the aid of an electronic computer. The oologists of the twenties might not easily have recognized this modern version of their hobby.

The study of daily activity (Fig. 4) made its appearance in Ornis Fennica in 1932. From that year on, the theme was treated repeatedly in Ornis Fennica until the mid-sixties, when it disappeared, at least as a main subject of contributions to the journal.

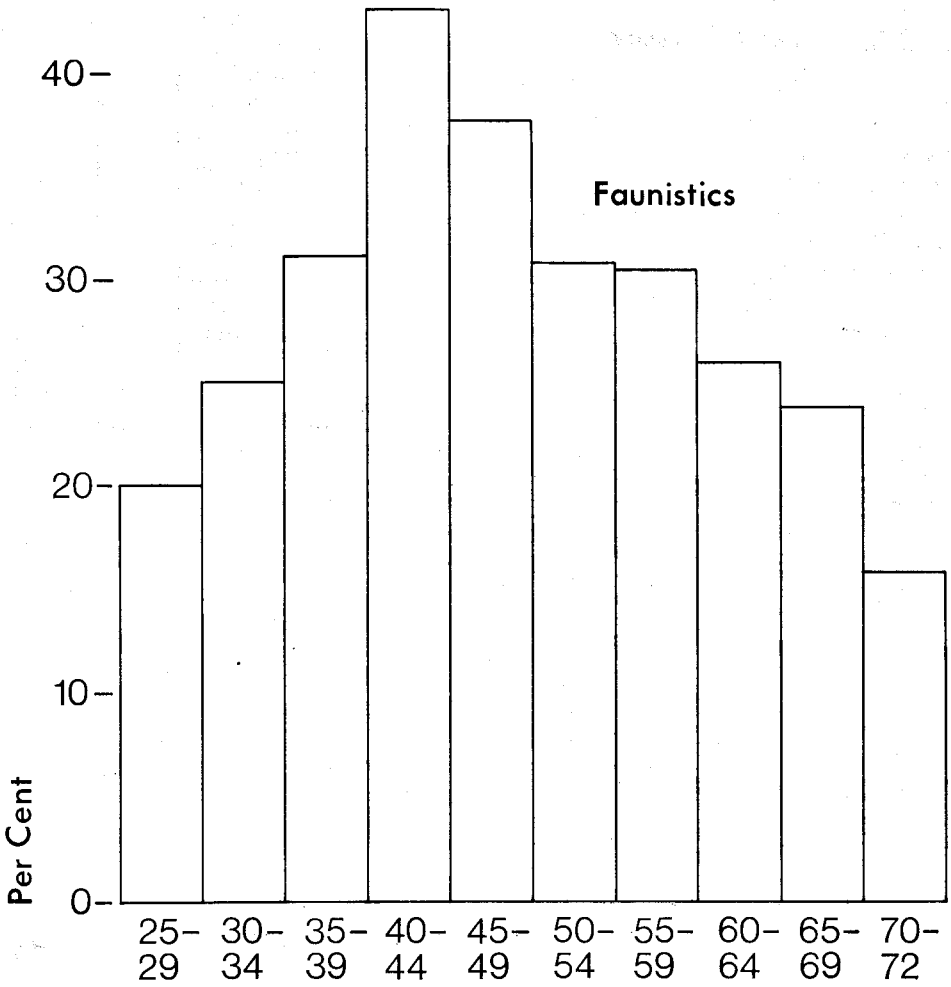


FIG. 3. Percentage of faunistic articles in Ornis Fennica in 1925—1972.

Census work (Fig. 4), likewise, first appeared in the early thirties. Since then, it has continued as one of the main fields of Finnish ornithology, though the methods used have varied.

A new departure is the recent interest in population problems. Before the seventies this field (if we exclude clutch-size) was only sporadically represented in Ornis Fennica (Fig. 4).

The first term of the Finnish Ornithological Society may be called the period of Ivar Hortling (1876—1946). Until 1931 he was the leading spirit of the Society, for a short time its President, then its Secretary-General, and throughout this period Editor of Ornis Fennica. Hortling's main interest was bird migration. Through numerous publications, including the two volumes of bird migration at Yyteri and Lake Oulujärvi published as special issues of Ornis Fennica in 1927 and 1928, respectively, he had a great impact upon

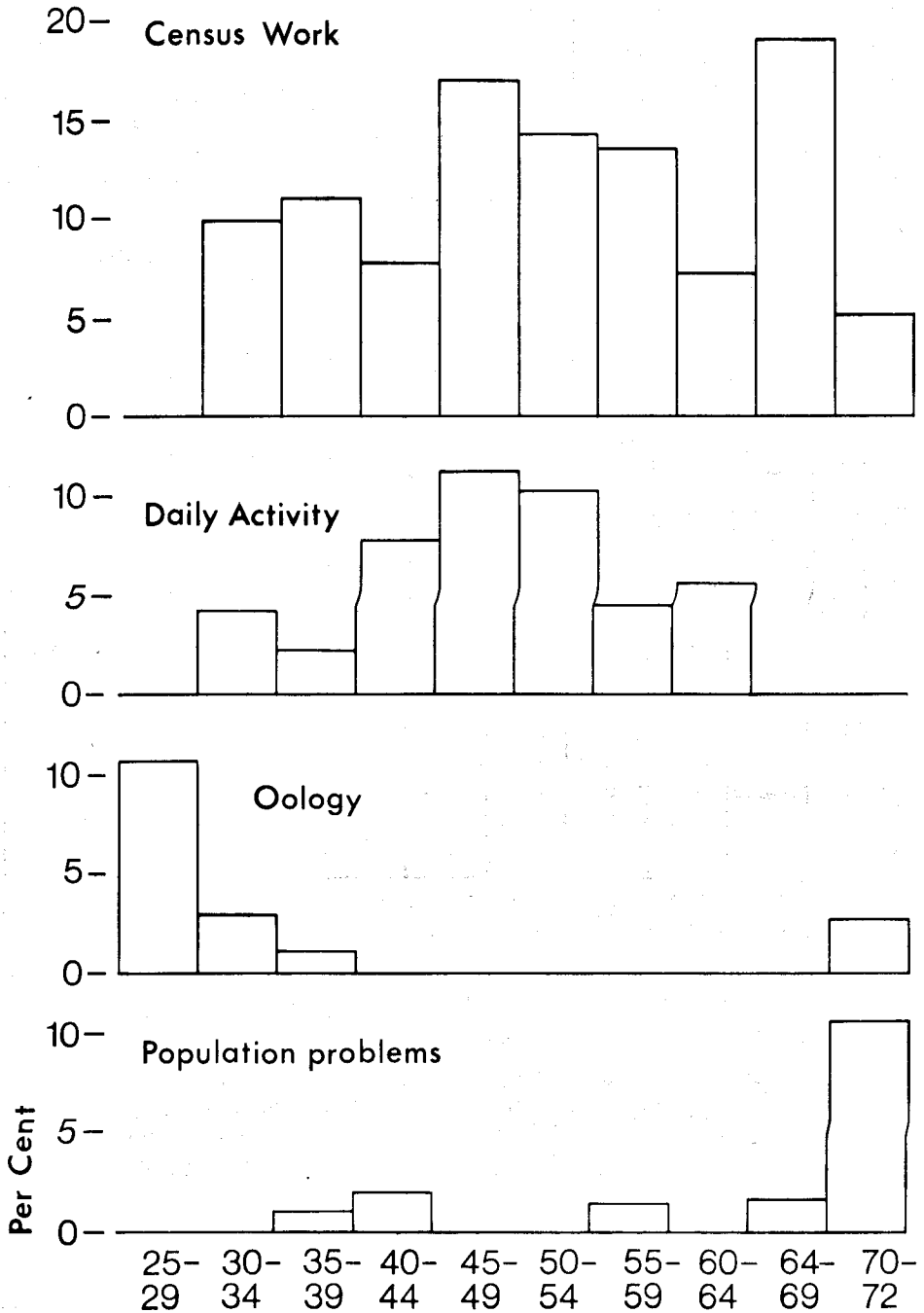


FIG. 4. Percentage of articles concerning censuses, daily activity, oology, and population problems in Ornis Fennica in 1925—1972.

the study of bird migration in Finland. He noticed the number of migrating birds seen daily, and compared these figures with the weather in a way that made him one of the pioneers of the study of bird migration. His Ornitologisk handbok (= Ornithological Handbook), published in 1929—31, was our counterpart of the British Practical Handbook and remained *the* handbook for two generations of Finnish ornithologists. This impressive activity was carried out though Hortling was, in fact, an amateur. He had taken a Ph.D. degree in German philology and earned his living as an grammar school teacher.

Another pioneer activity in the twenties was the introduction of regular observations on bird migration at Signilskär in the Åland Islands in the spring of 1927 through the artist Johannes Snellman, a talented bird and portrait painter, who had acquired unusual skill in identifying birds. At that time there was nothing comparable to the Signilskär bird station in the Northern Countries, but one had to go to Heligoland or Rossitten to find anything comparable.

The somewhat despotic way in which Hortling ruled the Finnish Ornithological Society led to a change in the regime in 1931. It is very sad that the ties between the Society and its first leading personage were broken. For Hortling it meant that he practically ceased to publish.

If the first period in the history of the Society was Hortling's, the second, beginning in 1931, was Pontus Palmgren's. In 1930, at the age of 23, he had published his Ph.D. thesis, the first in ornithology since Palmén, on the bird communities of the forests of the Åland Islands (Acta Zool. Fenn. 7). This was the first major census work to be published in Finland. In 1932 he published an article[1] on the variation in the intensity of bird song during the day, which was to be the first of numerous Finnish studies on the daily activity of birds. In 1933 came his study on the territories of birds in two woods, which introduced the study of territory into Finnish ornithology. In 1935 he described an apparatus for registering the Zugunruhe of caged birds, and in the next year his laboratory studies on bird migration were crowned with a discovery of lasting importance, as Siivonen and he demonstrated that a lowering of room temperature activated the migratory restlessness of a caged Songthrush in autumn. In 1937 again, Palmgren demonstrated that the migratory restlessness of the Robin increased in spring if the room temperature was raised. These investigations, and several others, including an extensive study on habitat selection in the Goldcrest and the Willow Tit (Acta Zool. Fenn. 14, 1932) prompted many more or less independent investigations in Finland and elsewhere. It is complete nonsense when David Lack, in his fragmentary posthumous autobiography (cf. Ibis 1973, p. 427), maintains that the only biologically minded ornithologists publishing field observations at that time were, apart from himself, R. E. Moreau, M. M. Nice, N. Tinbergen, and J. Grinell (!) and his pupils.[2] In Finland, field ornithology reached a peak in the decade before the Second World War.

Several other pioneering studies were carried out in Finland in the thirties. Among them should be counted, I think, Heikki Suomalainen's detailed investigation of the spread of the Greenish Warbler (1936). In 1937 Siivonen and Kalela (Acta Soc. Fauna Flora Fenn. 60) propounded the theory that the recent changes in the bird fauna of Northern Europe were caused by climatic

[1] Unless otherwise stated, articles mentioned appeared in Ornis Fennica.
[2] Another field ornithologist totally forgotten in this odd catalogue is S. Ch. Kendeigh.

changes.[1] Their investigation was followed by numerous others, in which the expansion of different species in Northern Europe was linked with the amelioration of the climate, which reached a peak in the thirties. We are nowadays becoming more conscious of the importance of changes in the environment caused directly or indirectly by man, but it still seems plausible that climatic changes have had an effect upon the distribution and abundance of many bird species in Northern Europe.

The thirties also saw the first experimental studies on the physiology of birds. H. Suomalainen (1936) investigated the spermatogenesis of the Great Tit in relation to day length and temperature. Olof Granit's paper on hearing in birds was published in 1941 after the death of the author in the war, but the work was done in the thirties. Another study, the first of its kind in Finland, was made by Göran Bergman on the site tenacity and life-span of Chaffinches on an island near Helsinki, with the aid of ringed individuals (1939). The author was a school-boy of fourteen when he began this investigation.

After the Second World War, the character of ornithology changed in many respects. Its heroic age was over, and instead it became a science of great breadth, in which individual achievements did not stand out so clearly as before. In the thirties it was still possible to read all the main articles appearing on bird biology. Since the fifties this has been completely impossible. In the history of the Finnish Ornithological Society, which I wrote in 1964, and of which the present article is an up-to-date version, I listed the following new fields of study or new methods: population studies with the aid of ringing; ethology; the use of the ciné camera in the study of behaviour, and of the tape-recorder in the study of birds' voices; the creating of new bird stations (the Signilskär station was reopened in 1949 after the interruption due to the war, and after this a huge number of new stations were established); the enormous increase in ringing activity; the study of breeding biology with the aid of nest-cards; the Christmas census; the development of wildlife research; the continuing study of the distribution of the birds of Finland, which culminated in Merikallio's Finnish Birds (Fauna Fennica V, 1958), based on the census work carried out by the author during a lifetime.

To this list we could today add further problems and methods, typical of the last decade and the time immediately before that: bird migration studied by radar; the study of the effect of pesticides and other types of pollution; the intensified study of moulting; the application of new mathematical methods and the use of electronic computers in ornithological work; the use of TV cameras in the study of bird biology; mapping the distribution of the birds of the country with the aid of a grid system; the new census work supported by the Zoological Museum, Helsinki. I must confess that, although I am no admirer of technology in general, I was delighted when, in a recent issue of Ornis Fennica (1972, p. 88, Pulliainen & Hakanen), I read the following passage on a brood of the Pine Grosbeak:

> "On July 4th (01.51—01.54) a Siberian Jay *Perisoreus infaustus* was seen pecking the young with its bill. One of them died. The predator was driven away with the aid of the TV camera, which was moved rapidly by remote control."

The above-listed new spearheads of the ever-developing science of ornithology do not imply that the old problems and old methods have become

[1] In this they agreed with the Swedish ornithologist L. A. Jägerskiöld, who wrote an article on the same subject but based on much less evidence (Sveriges Natur, 1919).

obsolete. With a pair of binoculars and enough time one can still do a lot of things. In this connection I wish to stress the great importance of amateur ornithologists. Without this large, partly anonymous, and too often disregarded group, even the most outstanding professionals would be like generals without an army. Rule out the work done by amateurs, for example, in bird ringing, and not much will be left. Again, rule out bird ringing, and how much would be left of ornithology?

The present issue of Ornis Fennica is devoted to recent trends in Finnish ornithology. Representatives of different branches of ornithology have given brief accounts of the present situation in their fields of research.

Selostus: **Suomen Lintutieteellinen Yhdistys 1924—1974.**

Samalla kun SLY täyttää viisikymmentä vuotta, maamme lintutiede tavallaan täyttää sata vuotta. Toukokuun 9. p:nä 1874 nimittäin J. A. Palmén puolusti väitöskirjaansa "Om foglarnes flyttningsvägar". Kaksi vuotta myöhemmin teos ilmestyi laajennettuna ja saksaksi käännettynä. Se sai runsaasti lukijoita ulkomaillakin, ja Palmén kävi siitä ankaraa väittelyä saksalaisen lintutieteilijän v. Homeyerin kanssa.

Eläintieteen professorina ja julkaisemalla ornitologisen tutkimusohjelman (1885) Palmén suoranaisesti tai välillisesti sai joukon oppilaita (mm. Finnilä, Krank, Montell, Munsterhjelm, Nordling, R. Palmgren, Sandman ja E. W. Suomalainen), joiden pääasiallisesti 1898—1918 julkaisemien paikallisfaunojen tuloksena linnustomme levinneisyys selvitettiin pääpiirteissään.

Jo ennen Palménia oli Suomessa olemassa vaatimaton lintufaunistinen tutkimus. Tärkeimmät tämän alan edustajat olivat veljekset von Wright, ennen kaikkea Magnus (1805—1868), joka julkaisi ensimmäisen Helsingin seudun lintufaunan ja ensimmäisen koko maatamme koskevan lintutieteellisen käsikirjan (1859, toinen osa, Palménin viimeistelemänä ja julkaisemana 1873).

SLY kuului niihin lukuisiin yhdistyksiin, jotka perustettiin maamme saavutettua itsenäisyyden. Perustava kokous pidettiin tammikuun 18. p:nä 1924. Suunnitelmana oli ensin perustaa rekisteröimätön yhdistys, mutta suunnitelmat muuttuivat, ja maaliskuun 22. p:nä 1924 viranomaiset hyväksyivät yhdistyksen säännöt.

Ensimmäisenä vuotenaan SLY:llä oli 111 jäsentä. Kolme vuotta myöhemmin luku oli noussut lähes kolminkertaiseksi ja tällaiseksi se jäi ainakin 30-luvun puoliväliin. V. 1964 jäsenmäärä oli noussut lähes kuuteensataan, ja v. 1970 yhdistyksellä oli 914 kotimaista jäsentä.

Yhdistyksen kokouksissa kävi alussa n. 20—30 henkeä. 1936 ja 1937 saavutettiin huippu, mutta lukumäärä aleni taas sodan aikana (kuva 1), nousten kuitenkin heti sodan jälkeen saavuttaen huippulukeman vuosina 1963—65, jääden tämänkin jälkeen korkeaksi.

Ornis Fennican laajuus (kuva 2) on kasvanut tasaisesti sodan jälkeisinä vuosina. Vuonna 1965 Yhdistys sitäpaitsi rupesi julkaisemaan Lintumies-lehteä. Ornis Fennican sisällössä huomaa tietyt muutokset (kuva 3—4). Niinpä faunistiikkaa koskevat kirjoitelmat saavuttivat huipun sodan aikana, vähentyen sen jälkeen. Linnunmunia koskevaa aineistoa oli runsaasti 1920-luvulla. Lintujen lukumääriä ja päivärytmiikkaa koskevia kirjoitelmia alkoi ilmestyä vasta 1930-luvulla, ja populaatiotutkimuksia runsaammin vasta 1970-luvulla.

Perustamisesta vuoteen 1931 asti yhdistyksen dominoiva henkilö oli Ivar Hortling. Muuttotutkijana hän oli edelläkävijä maassamme, ja hänen käsikirjansa "Ornitologisk handbok" oli suurtyö. Muuttolintututkimus oli muutenkin tähän aikaan etualalla. Vuonna 1927 perustettiin taiteilija J. Snellmanin toimesta Signilskärin muuttolintuasema, laatuaan ensimmäinen Pohjoismaissa.

Koko 30-luvun johtava lintutieteilijä oli taas Pontus Palmgren. Hänen tutkimuksensa koskivat mm. eri metsä- ja järvityyppien lintukantojen runsautta, linnunlaulun päivärytmiikkaa, reviiriteoriaa, lintujen muuttoa (jota tutkittiin rekisteröimällä häkkilintujen yöllistä liikuntaa muuttoaikoina) sekä yksityisten lajien ekologiaa; hänen tutkimuksensa hippiäisen ja hömötiaisen ekologiasta sai aikaan monet samantapaiset tutkimukset sekä meillä että ulkomaillakin.

Kolmekymmentäluvulla ruvettiin myös systemaattisesti selvittämään lintufaunassamme tapahtuneita muutoksia (Siivonen ja Kalela). Ensimmäiset lintufysiologiset tutkimukset meillä olivat H. Suomalaisen kokeellinen tutkimus talitiaiskoiraan sukupuolisen toiminnan heräämisestä keväällä ja Granitin tutkimus lintujen kuuloaistista. Bergmanin kirjoitelma peipon paikkauskollisuudesta ja eliniästä oli alansa ensimmäinen Suomessa.

Lintutieteen sodanjälkeistä kehitystä luonnehtivat uudet tutkimussuunnat ja -menetelmät vanhojen rinnalla sekä tutkijain lukumäärän nopea nousu.