

Obituary: Rolf Karl Heinz Grantsau (1928-2015)¹

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Rolf Karl Heinz Grantsau was born on 25 March 1928 in Kiel, Germany, and died in São Paulo, Brazil, on 25 June 2015. He was married to Ilse Grantsau, whom usually helped review Rolf's papers and books. Ilse's support allowed Rolf to fulfill his ornithological dreams. They had two children: Marion Grantsau Engelbrecht, born in Germany, and Ingo Grantsau, born in Brazil.

Since an early age, Rolf was very interested in nature and wildlife, a taste he acknowledged to having earned from his father. His formal education in school was impaired by the outbreak of World War II. After the war ended, he began to work in the Zoological Institute, University of Kiel, where he took courses on taxidermy and scientific illustration. He also undertook the Zoology course, but, having been unable to finish High School, he could not receive an official degree. In the University of Kiel he befriended the ornithologists Hans-Wilhelm and Maria Koepcke, who invited Rolf to move to Peru to study birds. He gave up this plan to marry Ilse in 1957. A couple of years later he was invited to work for the well-known "Vogelwarte Helgoland" (Heligoland Bird Observatory) banding birds on the island of Heligoland, moving his whole family there in the process.

After about two and a half years on Helgoland, Rolf decided to pursue one of his dreams: to study either birds of paradise or hummingbirds. He even owned a small boat named "Kolibri" (hummingbird) in Germany. Rolf had studied ornithology with the renowned Erwin Stresemann, so the presence of another of Stresemann's students in Brazil – Helmut Sick – helped Rolf decide to immigrate with his family to South America.

He arrived in Sao Paulo in 1962 and soon began to study hummingbird taxonomy. But his interests in the natural world went far beyond birds. Rolf was a true naturalist. In Brazil he also studied and collected mammals, reptiles, insects, orchids, carnivorous plants, lichens, etc. Rolf worked for a German car factory as an illustrator and so most of his research was undertaken in his "free" time. Nonetheless, he managed to travel to many places around the country. In the 1980s he travelled twice to Antarctica and even wrote an unpublished book on "the fauna of Antarctica", ranging from marine crustaceans, through



Rolf Grantsau at the Museu de Zoologia of Universidade de São Paulo in February 2009 (photo: Fabio Schunck).

fish, to birds. All animals were presented with illustrations and keys to identification, all produced by himself. Unfortunately, for financial reasons, he never managed to get it published. Many of the new species he found there (e.g. fish) were later described by other researchers. Over the years, Rolf also produced other unpublished books, such as "Bats of Brazil", "Dendrobatid frogs of Brazil", and so on. In his last years, he was producing a book on moths and a new monograph on hummingbirds. He even learned, at the age of 80, to work on Photoshop, and so he developed a new way to produce bird illustrations: he would take photographs of study skins from several

¹ Adapted, with permission, from the obituary published by P.C. Lima (2015. *Atualidades Ornitológicas* 185:40).

positions and later paste them all to create a “live” hummingbird. An example of his “photo art”, as he would call it, can be seen in Cavarzere *et al.* (2014). He would happily show the hundreds of plates he had produced, including pictures of nests and eggs took by himself, to any person who visited him.

He published four main books: *Os beija-flores do Brasil* (1988), which is also available in German (Die Kolibris Brasilien); *As cobras venenosas do Brasil* (1991), which is the base for the revised and amplified *Serpentes peçonhentas do Brasil* (2013); and the 2 volume *Guia completo para identificação das aves do Brasil* (2010). All the books feature his own illustrations.

Rolf’s drawings also appear in many papers and books by other researchers. He has contributed to many scientific institutions, such as the Museu de Zoologia da Universidade de São Paulo and Instituto Butantan, and took part in the project and creation of the *Museu de História Natural* of CETREL, Bahia. He was awarded the titles of Honorary Associate of the *Centro de Estudos Ornitológicos* (São Paulo) as well as Honorary Member of the Brazilian Ornithological Records Committee (CBRO). In 2007, Rolf Grantsau’s career was celebrated at Avistar, the Brazilian birdwatching fair.

Rolf described the following bird taxa:

Augastes scutatus ilseae 1967 (Trochilidae)
Phaethornis maranhaoensis 1968 (Trochilidae)
Threnetes loehkeni 1969 (Trochilidae)
Eupetionema macroura cyanoviridis 1988 (Trochilidae)
Hylocharis cyanus griseiventris 1988 (Trochilidae)
Phaethornis ochraceiventris camargoi 1988 (Trochilidae)
Phaethornis pretrei minor 1988 (Trochilidae)
Amazona kawalli 1989, with Hélio Camargo (Psittacidae)
Charadrius wilsonia brasiliensis 2008, with P.C. Lima (Charadriidae)
Caprimulgus longirostris pedrolimai 2008 (Caprimulgidae)
Thalurania furcata rupicola 2010 (Trochilidae)
Sakesphoroides 2010 (Thamnophilidae)
Dacnis lineata albirostris 2010 (Thraupidae)
Dacnis flaviventer orientalis 2010 (Thraupidae)

Rolf Grantsau is honored in the names of three species: the sundew (carnivorous plant) *Drosera grantsaui* Rivadavia 2003, the longhorn beetle *Gnomidolon grantsaui* Martins 1967, and the Sincora Antwren, *Formicivora grantsaui* Gonzaga *et al.* 2007.

His knowledge was impressive and he could easily discuss identification issues and taxonomy of almost any organism. More importantly, Rolf was always ready to help and teach others who asked for his advice or opinion. But he was very devoted to discipline and, if people applied a method different from his, he would often think

it was inadequate. Similarly, he could not accept freely that someone could study an organism without going to the field and observing it in detail. In this sense, and as a classical naturalist, he was especially concerned with molecular-based studies that support so many revolutions in our understanding of bird phylogenetics. All that is expressed in a self-portrait in his most recent book on birds (2010; Figure 1). Thus, seeking to do his work in the best way possible, Rolf was unrelenting to what he would judge as mistakes, even from friends. If anybody made a mistake, the person certainly would hear his famous complaint: “*Assim não dá!*” [“this way it cannot be done”].

We thank our friends J. F. Pacheco and L. F. Figueiredo for helping with the list of Rolf’s publications, A. C. Lees for several corrections to the first draft, P. Salviano and H. Palo Jr. kindly allowed publication of material under their care.

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- Grantsau, R. 1968.** Uma nova espécie de *Phaethornis* (Aves, Trochilidae). *Papéis Avulsos de Zoologia* 22(7): 57-59.
- Grantsau, R. 1968.** Die Wiederentdeckung der brasilianischen Kolibris *Augastes scutatus* und *Augastes lumachellus*. *Journal für Ornithologie* 109: 434-437.
- Grantsau, R. 1969.** Uma nova espécie de *Threnetes* (Aves, Trochilidae). *Papéis Avulsos de Zoologia* 22(23): 245-247.
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- Grantsau, R. 1988.** *Os beija-flores do Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Expressão e Cultura.
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- Grantsau, R. & H. F. de A. Camargo. 1989.** Nova espécie brasileira de *Amazona* (Aves: Psittacidae). *Revista Brasileira de Biologia* 49(4): 1017-1020.
- Grantsau, R. 1991.** As cobras venenosas do Brasil. São Bernardo do Campo: Bandeirante.
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cabeçacinha (*Diomedea c. cauta* Gould, 1841). *Atualidades Ornitológicas* 118:3.

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Grantsau, R. 2008. Uma nova subespécie de *Caprimulgus longirostris* (Aves, Caprimulgidae). *Atualidades Ornitológicas* 145: 4-5.

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Lima, P. C.; R. Grantsau; R. C. R. F. Lima; T. N. C Lima-Neto & L. E. S. Silva. 2010. Ninhos de espécies ameaçadas, endêmicas e outras de comportamento reprodutivo pouco conhecido, na pátria da arara-azul-de-lear (*Anodorhynchus leari*) (Psittaciformes: Psittacidae), destacando-se novos dados sobre o comportamento reprodutivo do besourinho-de-cauda-larga (*Phaethornis gounellei*

(Apodiformes: Trochilidae) a descrição do ninho da choca-do-nordeste (*Sakesphorus cristatus*) (Passeriformes: Thamnophilidae) e do jacucaca (*Penelope jacucaca*) (Galliformes: Cracidae). *Atualidades Ornitológicas On-line* 153: 69-161.

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Cavarzere V.; L. F. Silveira; M. F. Vasconcelos; R. Grantsau & F.C. Straube F. C. 2014. Taxonomy and biogeography of *Stephanoxis* Simon, 1897 (Aves: Trochilidae). *Papéis Avulsos de Zoologia* 54: 69-79.

He further published the following popular writings:

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Grantsau, R. 1985. Caboré. *SOBoletim* 8:6.

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GUIA DE CAMPO DO FUTURO

Auto retrato

FIGURE 1. Rolf's concern with molecular studies being dissociated from fieldwork is fully expressed in this self-portrait: "Which bird is this? The field guide of the future." (reproduced, with permission, from Grantsau 2010).