

Obituary: Walter Adolfo Voss (1933–2020)

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With regret, we announce to the ornithological community the death of our dear friend and colleague Walter Adolfo Voss (Fig. 1) on 26 August 2020. He was born on 22 April 1933 in Montenegro, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, and leaves two sons (Jacques Germano and Jaime), one daughter (Jeanette), and five grandchildren.

Airplanes were his early passion. As a child, in 1938, he moved in the prelude of the Second World War with his family to Germany, where he lived until 1948. Airplanes, even from “enemy” countries, were then depicted in aircraft identification manuals designed for civilians, which he used as “field guides.” It was around 1943, at the age of 10, that Voss, then studying Natural History at the gymnasium, had his curiosity captured by two small resting birds and found himself interested in identifying them. He then managed to buy the field guide entitled *Was fliegt denn da?* (“What is flying there?”), one of the most successful German bird guides of all time, first published in 1936. From then on, he never stopped watching and studying birds. Between 1951 and 1953, he lived in Rio de Janeiro, where he performed the compulsory military service in Aeronautics.

Voss was self-taught in several areas. His drawing abilities, for example, led him to work as a machine designer for the footwear industry in the Vale do Rio dos Sinos region (Rio Grande do Sul state), where he lived most of his life. Graduated in Social Communication, Journalism, in 1977, he used his skills and professional knowledge for scientific dissemination throughout his career. Between 1975 and 1996, he served at the Fundação Zoobotânica do Rio Grande do Sul (FZBRS), where for many years, he worked as a technician at the zoological park and, later, as a researcher and curator of birds at the Museu de Ciências Naturais. In love with natural sciences, at the age of 50, he decided to take a Master’s degree in Ecology from the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) at Porto Alegre, defending his dissertation in 1989. Closer to his retirement, he became an assistant professor at the Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos (UNISINOS) in São Leopoldo, dedicating himself to research and extension activities at that institution between 1997 and 2003, when he also had the opportunity to take part in scientific expeditions to Antarctica.

Walter A. Voss was one of the foremost Brazilian ornithologists of his generation, working especially in Rio Grande do Sul. He published dozens of scientific contributions and booklets, mostly on birds, but also on mammals, and translated several others from German and English into Portuguese. The avifauna of urban and periurban environments and the history of the ornithological investigation of Rio Grande do Sul were at the center of his interest in science. Methodical and organized, his observations and annotated species lists were always meticulously prepared and carefully presented. In 1984, by translating Helmut Sick’s remarkable work *Vogelwanderungen in Kontinentalen Südamerika*, originally published in *Vogelwarte* in 1968, Voss made one of the most complete essays on bird migration in South America fully accessible to the Portuguese-speaking ornithological community at a time when few other sources on the subject were available. Lately, he was engaged in translating Hermann von Ihering’s (1850–1930) early works on the birds of Rio Grande do Sul from German, a task he fortunately managed to complete and will

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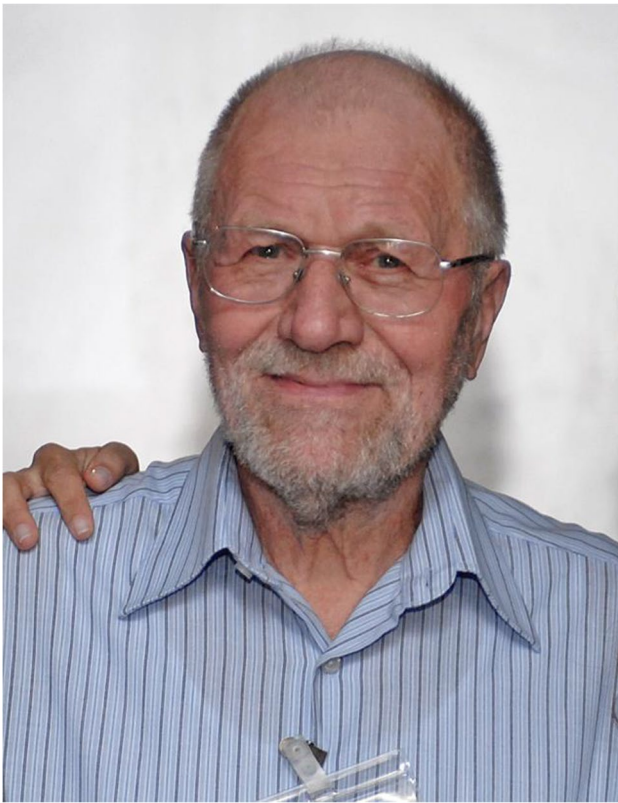


Fig. 1 Walter Adolfo Voss attending a photographic exhibition on Grassland Birds of the Araucaria Plateau at PUCRS's Museu de Ciências e Tecnologia, Porto Alegre, in 2009. Credit: Laboratório de Ornitologia, PUCRS

soon be released. Upon retiring, Voss generously shared his extensive bibliography and personal equipment accumulated over more than 30 years of career among several emerging ornithologists based in Rio Grande do Sul, including some of the authors. Voss advised or co-advised many ornithology students in southern Brazil, usually without formal academic ties, but with a lot of dedication and presence. He was a key figure behind the professional development of most researchers and professors who today serve as undergraduate or graduate advisors at the main universities in Rio Grande do Sul. Therefore, in Rio Grande do Sul's ornithological genealogy from the late twentieth century onwards Voss leaves "children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren" working in different research areas and keeping his teachings in mind. His visits to our offices and labs always yielded rich and valuable conversations. Voss always had a wise opinion or suggestion to share, enriching our research not only technically, but also humanly.

The true impact of Voss's scientific work is difficult to measure, because in so many ways, he sought to disseminate and popularize science throughout his career. Inspired by the European school, he was a major contributor of the introduction and dissemination of birdwatching in Brazil,

having directly influenced other ornithologists working in the country such as Helmut Sick (1910–1991) and William Belton (1914–2009) to translate the technical results of their research into a language that could be understood by amateur observers. He was one of the founders of the country's first birdwatchers' club (COA), in 1974, and of the Brazilian Society of Ornithology (SBO), in 1987. In recognition of his contribution to Brazilian ornithology, Voss became an honorary member of the Comitê Brasileiro de Registros Ornitológicos (CBRO) in 2001.

Voss had a particular interest in printed birdwatching resources such as folding field checklists and pocket identification guides, which he collected throughout his life and used to improve his own published materials. The booklet *Pequeno guia de identificação dos animais de caça do Rio Grande do Sul* ("Pocket guide for the identification of the game animals of Rio Grande do Sul") (Silva and Voss 1977) was one of the first identification guides published in Brazil. The later *Aves do Parque Farroupilha em Porto Alegre* (Voss and Sander 1984) stands out among other guides of its time both for its very low cost and for its extremely simple texts and outline illustrations, in a clear attempt of its authors to make it accessible to everyone. Additionally, in a little-known article entitled *Aspectos dimensionais do assim chamado livro de bolso* ("Dimensional aspects of the so-called pocket book"), Voss (1978) makes a broad analysis of almost 400 references in different languages to express his thoughts on the need to improve the functionality of identification guides for their usage by all audiences.

Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that Voss was one of the founding fathers of birding in Brazil. His contributions listed below speak for themselves. To a similar extent, he also became one of the pioneers and early disseminators of bird banding in Brazil, having taught the first ringing courses in the country between 1979 and 1986. It can certainly be said that, without Voss, both ornithology and birdwatching in Brazil would be less accessible and attractive today. His generosity of spirit, authenticity, wisdom, pleasant talk, and innocent sense of humor, far beyond his customary skepticism and reclusiveness, will remain countless memories of a truly great friend and colleague. We hope that his legacy will be recognized and followed by this and the next generations interested in knowing and conserving the wonders of birds.

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