



Preface

About 200 years ago, the great naturalist Alexander von Humboldt wanted 'to understand nature through its inner power and lively whole.' At that time, such integrative organismal biology was just a mental framework, wishful – and yet pioneering – thinking. Roughly 150 years later, at a time when such detailed, painstaking, methodical, and often tedious studies were still very rare, two young scientists embarked on a similar life voyage, to understand a group of organisms in its lively whole – 'little brown job' Reed warblers.

The result we have in hand now, summing up 50 years of their own research and that of excellent research groups around the world, is a mind blowing science treasure that will instantly become a classic. Hallmarks of Bernd Leisler's and Karl Schulze-Hagen's approach are their never-ending, deep love for their study subjects, the clarity of their writing and the intrinsic beauty of their pictures and illustrations.

As readers we are fortunate that Bernd and Karl took their time to finish the book because we now have an integrative view of this fascinating group of organisms and their evolution. Science often goes in fashions, favoring a specific topic and interpretation for a decade or so. Four decades ago, the fashion was habitat selection and its influence on behavior and morphology, then genetically-informed systematics, host-parasite interactions and the latest interest, sexual selection. Every few decades, these topics are brought up again and revisited. This has the major advantage that the original information is checked for its explanatory power in the light of all new knowledge, and only the data and hypotheses that weathered time remain. Such solid knowledge is what is presented in this book, giving rise to many ideas about what to study in the future. The coming decades may see a lot of studies in the areas of movement and migration, perhaps allowing us to understand the interconnectedness of Polish marshes with the wetlands in the Mediterranean and Africa, or between Russia and Southeast Asia. We need this information, not least to better protect the future habitat and migration routes of our beloved warblers. Given the general interconnectedness of life on earth, perhaps knowledge about and protection of the little brown jobs will turn out to be more important to us than we can yet envisage.

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