

## *OBITUARIES*

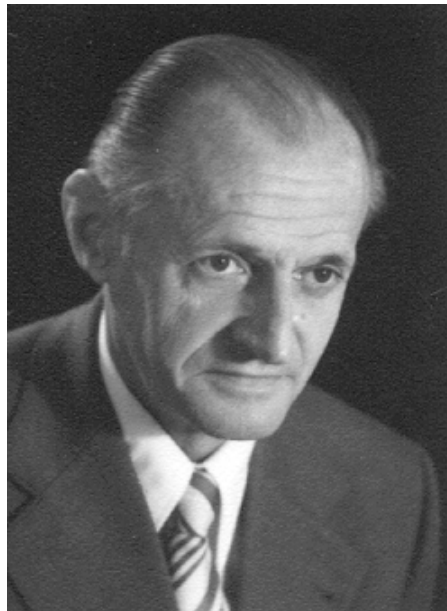
Edited by James Wiley

(To whom obituary manuscripts should be sent)

**Hans-Wilhelm Koepcke, 1914–2000**— Hans-Wilhelm Koepcke died in Hamburg, Germany, on 21 November 2000. He was 86 years old. To those of us who started working on Neotropical birds in the mid-1960s, the name Koepcke is synonymous with Peru. The husband and wife team of Hans-Wilhelm and Maria Koepcke resided at that time in Miraflores, a suburb of Peru's capital, Lima, where they were in charge of Humboldt House, the

small villa where all visitors to Peru stopped on their way to and from field sites in the Amazon lowlands, the Andes, or the arid coast. Although many ornithologists might associate the name Koepcke and Peruvian ornithology only with Maria, it must be pointed out that Hans-Wilhelm's work and his role in Peruvian ornithology were of tremendous importance also.

Born in Pomerania on 23 June 1914,



Hans-Wilhelm Koepcke, 1914–2000.  
(Photograph taken c. 1980, courtesy of Juliane Diller.)

Hans-Wilhelm obtained a Doctorate in Natural Sciences at the University of Kiel in 1947. Not long thereafter, Hans-Wilhelm traveled to Peru where he started work at the “Javier Prado” Museum of Natural History in Lima, an institution affiliated with the ancient and distinguished Universidad San Marcos. Maria von Mikulicz-Radecki, whom he had met during his studies at Kiel, joined him in Peru where they were married in 1950. Whereas Hans-Wilhelm was chair of the Ichthyology Section of the “Javier Prado” Museum, Maria became head of the “Bird and Mammal Section.” Together they planned a series of journeys through Peru, expeditions that would eventually allow them to survey all major habitats of that country, starting with the Andean west slopes near Lima, and expanding the geographic scope of their explorations farther and farther away. In a previous piece in *Ornithologia Neotropical* (6: 100–102, 1995), I recalled some facets of the life and work of Maria Koepcke. I should here mention some of the highlights of Hans-Wilhelm's accomplishments.

From an ornithological standpoint, Hans-Wilhelm Koepcke's work will be remembered chiefly through the contributions he co-authored with Maria. These include “*Las Aves de Importancia Económica del Perú*,” a series of 19 leaflets that were published in Lima by the Ministerio de Agricultura, Servicio Forestal y de Caza, between 1963 and 1971. A few years ago, Hans-Wilhelm sent me what had been published to date of that project, a total of 152 pages representing 148 species, from the Humboldt Penguin (*Spheniscus humboldti*) to the Andean Gull (*Larus serranus*), all of them contained in a green jacket adorned with the sketch of the head profile of a Razor-billed Curassow (*Mitu mitu*) drawn by Maria. Each species is treated on a separate page where it is described, its characters listed, its size mentioned, its voice analyzed, and its ecology specified. Each account is illustrated by a

black and white drawing showing a close-up of the bird and a background illustrating its natural habitat. These portraits, texts and figures, are simply lovely and were prepared largely from the Koepckes' direct knowledge of these birds in the field. Other publications from Hans-Wilhelm's pen include his 320 page monograph on the ecology of the western slopes of the Peruvian Andes, published in 1961 as a Bonner Geographische Abhandlungen (Number 29: *Synökologische Studien an der Westseite der peruanischen Anden*). Although not only ornithological, this book-length paper includes the birds and many other aspects of the ecology of this fascinating area, full of various ecological islands (lomas in the coastal deserts, forest islands along the mid-montane slopes). While greatly interested in birds and other land vertebrates, Hans-Wilhelm's curiosity took him into other zoological realms. Thus he published widely on marine invertebrates and fishes, research that led him to investigate the biogeography of Peru's waters, and especially of its fish fauna. Beyond that, Hans-Wilhelm, ever fascinated by broad biological questions, and still while living in Peru, started working on his *magnum opus*, eventually published as a 2-volume set, in German, by Goecke & Evers, entitled *Die Lebensformen*, and subtitled *Grundlagen zu einer universell gültigen biologischen Theorie* (The basis for a universally valid biological theory), in 1971 and 1973. The number of topics covered in this monumental work (volume 1, pages 1–789; volume 2, pages 790–1684) is simply astonishing, and includes the concept of adaptation, death of individuals and of species, homology, systematics, ecological specialization, teleology, convergences, social signalization, mimicry, sexuality, mating systems, and many others. Richly illustrated, this work draws its empirical examples from many forms of life, where birds, and Peruvian or South American birds especially, figure prominently.

After many years spent exploring the Andean and Pacific parts of Peru, the Koepckes decided that in order to continue their life work of understanding and describing Peru's biodiversity on the basis of their own experience, they had to live in the Amazon forest east of the Andes. They selected a small parcel of land along the Río Lullapichis, a tributary of the Río Pachitea and within the watershed of the great Ucayali. After closing Casa Humboldt in 1967, they moved there. On her way back from Lima with a Christmas cake and some presents, Maria and her young daughter Juliane crashed in the Andean eastern foothills. That was 24 December 1971. Of all the passengers aboard the plane, only Juliane survived. After this tragedy, Hans-Wilhelm moved back to Germany in 1974, after his book had been published.

Hans-Wilhelm Koepcke lived until his death in Hamburg, obtaining a position in the Zoological Institute and Museum of Hamburg's University where he taught zoology. Juliane, daughter of Hans-Wilhelm and Maria, studied biology at Kiel, like her parents, receiving a diploma there in 1980, then went on to a doctorate at the Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich in 1987. She is a mammalogist, specializing in bats, and has returned to carry out research at the site that her parents had selected for study in the Pachitea basin. I am very grateful to Juliane Diller for having kindly sent me a photograph of her father and for having checked the manuscript of this obituary.—François Vuilleumier, Department of Ornithology, American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, New York 10024, USA.

