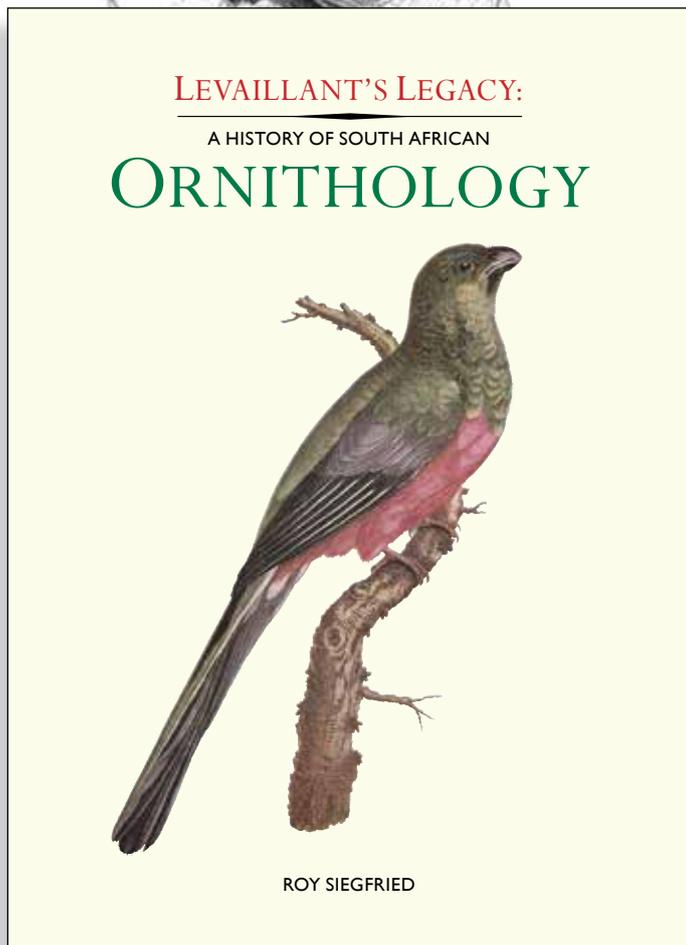


Levaillant's Legacy – A History of South African Ornithology is a remarkable synthesis of the history of the development of the study of birds in South Africa.



Levaillant's Legacy is not intended as a complete and comprehensive report: it reveals trends in progress and interprets such trends in terms of their causes and consequences. Until now, a history of South African ornithology has not been treated as an integrated whole or more than a chronological recitation of dates, names, places and events.

- First Flight – the beginnings of Ornithology
- South African Genesis – European influences
- Synthesis – the first authors and publications
- Illustration – illustrators and photographers
- Sound and recording
- Indigenisation – South African ornithology comes of age
- Organisations and Societies
- Conservation
- Outreach – spreading the word
- Science and Citizen Science
- Institutions

“Through the foundations that were laid between the 1970s and 1990s the science of bird study in this country has had arguably its most productive four decades of endeavour. Those currently in positions of ornithological leadership must rise to the challenge.”

Morne du Plessis
Chief Executive Officer
WWF South Africa

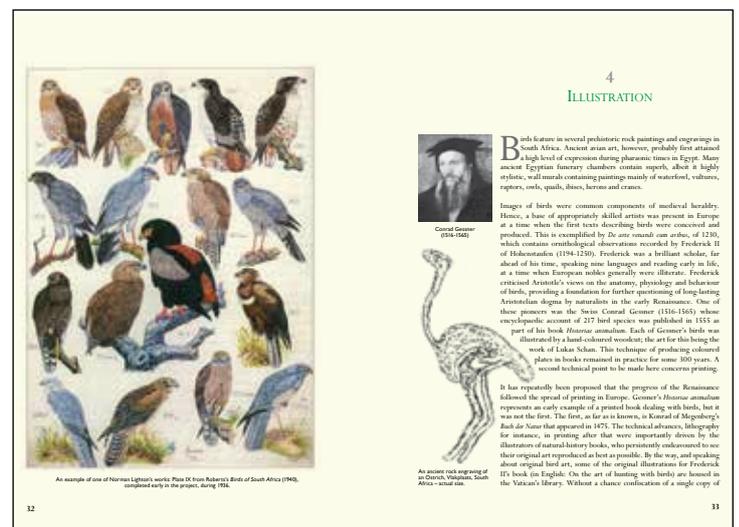
Emeritus Professor W Roy Siegfried provides an illustrated narrative which documents the chronology, geographical locations, persons, events and institutions that have promoted or retarded the development and evolution of South African ornithology.

BOOK DETAILS

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ILLUSTRATION



Birds feature in several prehistoric rock paintings and engravings in South Africa. Ancient man art, however, probably first attained a high level of expression during pharaonic times in Egypt. Many ancient Egyptian funerary chambers contain murals, albeit it highly stylized, wall murals containing paintings mainly of waterfowl, vultures, eagles, rock-creepers, ibis, herons and cranes.

Images of birds were common components of medieval heraldry. Hence, a base of appropriately skilled artists was present in Europe at a time when the first texts describing birds were conceived and produced. This is exemplified by the six-volume ornithology of 1286, which contains ornithological observations recorded by Frederick II of Hohenstaufen (1194-1250). Frederick was a brilliant scholar, far ahead of his time, speaking nine languages and reading early in life, at a time when European nobles generally were illiterate. Frederick criticized Aristotle's views on the anatomy, physiology and behaviour of birds, providing a foundation for further questioning of long-lasting Aristotelian dogma by naturalists in the early Renaissance. One of those pioneers was the Swiss Conrad Gessner (1516-1565) whose encyclopaedic account of 217 bird species was published in 1555 as part of his book *Historiae animalium*. Each of Gessner's birds was illustrated by a hand-coloured woodcut; the art for this being the work of Lukas Schan. This technique of producing coloured plates in books remained in practice for some 300 years. A second technical point to be made here concerns printing.

It has repeatedly been proposed that the progress of the Renaissance followed the spread of printing in Europe. Gessner's *Historiae animalium* represents an early example of a printed book dealing with birds, but it was not the first. The first, as far as is known, is Konrad Meissner's *Fasti de Nove* that appeared in 1475. The technical advances, lithography for instance, in printing after that were importantly driven by the illustrious natural history books, who painstakingly endeavored to see their original art reproduced as best as possible. By the way, and speaking about original bird art, some of the original illustrations for Frederick II's book (in English, on the art of hunting with birds) are housed in the Vatican's library. Without a chance consultation of a single copy of

An example of one of the most English birds, from the book 'Birds of South Africa' (1965), compiled early in the project, during 1955.

An ancient rock engraving of an ibis, depicted in the art of hunting with birds, as housed in the Vatican's library. Without a chance consultation of a single copy of