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# In memory of Svein Haftorn

Norway's Grand Old Man of ornithology, professor Svein Haftorn, passed away on 28 July 2003, 78 years old.

Haftorn was born 30 January 1925, and became interested in birds already during childhood in Drammen. By the time he was a young teenager, he had decided to devote his life to the study of birds. He started immediately by spending most of his days watching birds near his home, and soon discovered that school was a waste of time. Despite leaving school, he had some ambition to study zoology at the University of Oslo, and successfully passed all the exams required to enter. That was a terrible effort, he once told me. However, Haftorn's youthful passion was fortunate for avian science, because already during that period, when his friends were at school, he made many new discoveries that he later could share with Nils-Jarle Ytreberg and Per Hafslund in their own club «Faunisten». In fact, he always regarded the spring and summer of his 18<sup>th</sup> year (1943) as the greatest ever in his career, when he, for instance, found 16 nests of goldcrests. More importantly, he observed that some of our titmice, viz. willow tits, coal tits, and crested tits, stored seeds during autumn, and used them as an extra food supply during winter, whereas related species, the great tit and the blue tit, did not store food. With keen observation, he also detected the various feeding niches in the forest used by the birds, which allowed all the different species to co-exist within the same area, and to forage together in large mixed flocks during winter.

Haftorn's studies of feeding behaviour and food storing became the focus of one of his first publications, in 1944. It was also subject for his master's thesis (in 1952), and later for his doctoral thesis (in 1957). The work has become classical in ornithology, and in ecology in general, as he made his discoveries of food storing and feeding niches as early as, or even

earlier than, related studies of birds elsewhere, such as in England. Haftorn became a curator of ornithology, at Vitenskapsmuseet, in Trondheim in 1953, and professor of zoology in 1966 at Norges Lærerhøgskole, which later became a part of the University of Trondheim.

It is easy to see several qualities that made Haftorn such an excellent researcher: His deep and overwhelming interest for the lives of birds, making him notice small details that most others would have overlooked; his thoroughness and honesty about the results obtained; his ability to present the findings to a wider audience by a variety of channels including scientific papers, popularized books and notes, public talks, and even by presenting recordings of bird songs at schools and at universities; his interest in reading, to stay current on information of birds and of new statistical methods; and finally his openness to new techniques in research. For example, he was one of the first internationally to use video filming to record the breeding behaviour of birds within their nest cavities, and to use new technology to measure egg temperatures during incubation, nocturnal hypothermia, and metabolic costs of incubation of free living birds.

Most of his work was done on tits, particularly the willow tit, which was useful to study because it was resident all year round, was quite tame, and stored food. To locate willow tit nests was challenging, but Haftorn became an expert. He started describing the feeding and storing behaviour of willow tits when he was young, and later explained how winter flocks formed, and how the species lowered its body temperature at night during winter to save energy. By the time he retired from his position as a professor at the museum at the University of Trondheim, he had some very interesting papers on the ontogeny of vocalizations, and probably would have written a monograph on the willow tit if health had allowed him. He gave courses in ecology, and was an

excellent teacher. The students loved him and his lectures, where he was able to cover all aspects of ecology solely with examples from tits!

Haftorn's first books were a field guide to Norwegian birds, «Våre fugler» (1962), and a book about mountain animals, «Fjellfauna» (1966). In 1986, he published a very nice monograph of the goldcrest, perhaps his most favourite among our birds. He was always amazed by how such a tiny bird of only 5-6 g could survive the long and cold nights of the Norwegian winter, and also find food enough for a large brood in spring, often of ten chicks. He made detailed observations on the breeding behaviour of goldcrests from platforms close to their nests, 10-15 m high in spruce trees on his own property at Målsjøen, near Trondheim. The book was beautifully illustrated with his own unique photos of the bird and its behaviour.

Haftorn admired the great Norwegian explorers, like Fridtjof Nansen and Roald Amundsen, and

actually visited quite remote places himself, including Alaska and Siberia, the Bouvet Island, and Dronning Maud Land in Antarctica. He also had a great admiration for the country's pioneers in ornithology, and their classical books, viz. Robert Collett (Norges Fugle, 1921), and Herman L. Løvenskiold (Håndbok over Norges fugler, 1947). He felt a great responsibility to continue their work and advance the knowledge of the Norwegian avifauna. «Norges Fugler», which he published in 1971, soon became the standard reference for studies of birds in Norway, and still is. Haftorn compiled all data known at that time for every species, including detailed descriptions of behaviour, distribution, morphology, breeding and migratory habits. The book stimulated both amateurs and professionals not only to learn the current facts, but also to supplement them with new observations. Haftorn wondered if the ten years spent on collecting the data and writing this comprehensive book was worth the effort. History already tells he made the right decision.



*Svein Haftorn during fieldwork at Hardangervidda, Norway in June 1948. Photo: Edvard K. Barth.*



*Svein Haftorn during a song recording of Siberian Tit in Folldal, Hedmark, Norway in May 1989. Photo: Olav Hogstad.*

Haftorn did not burn out for interest and ideas after having finished the big book. No, instead a stream of high quality papers followed, flowing steadily until his death, as can be seen from the long list of his papers given below. He took advantage of his closest surroundings as study sites, even his own property. In particular, he liked to go with his wife Eva, to their cabin in the mountains at Venabu, near Lillehammer. Here, year after year, he censused birds, on line transects in all seasons, and started putting coloured leg bands on the willow tits for individual identification. It is difficult to highlight studies of particular importance to the scientific community from this later period of his career because there were so many. However, I admire in particular how he was able to integrate various disciplines of research, such as behaviour, ecology and physiology, to learn more about nature.

His studies of thermoregulation and costs of incubation, in collaboration with his Ph.D. student Randi Eidsmo Reinertsen, are therefore among my favourites. His work on the initiation of incubation in tits is also much cited. It was assumed that hatching asynchrony was related to the timing of onset of incubation. Thanks to video-filming and continuous measurements of egg temperatures, Haftorn provided the evidence. He also solved the puzzle of how the female could spend the night in the nest during the egg laying period without actually incubating the eggs, so that the clutch nevertheless could hatch synchronously. Finally, his latest and pioneering studies on the ontogeny of vocalizations in the willow tit, deserve to be mentioned again.

The driving force behind Haftorn's work was his keen interest in nature and a desire to reveal some secrets of the lives of birds that made them well adapted to an often harsh, northern, environment. His innate curiosity was far greater than any effort to achieve personal status. Perhaps his early contributions would have received even more public recognition had he published in more international journals. For instance, his studies on the feeding behaviour of the tits were published in a local journal in Norway. Nevertheless, this work is much cited, and at the time no tradition for publishing ecological papers in international journals had yet been established in Norway. It should also be noted that Haftorn did indeed receive some highly deserved honour from the scientific community of the time; he was a member of the Norwegian Academy of Science, and he received His Majesty's Golden Medal.

Haftorn did not like administrative duties. I enjoyed meetings when he held the chair position. The discussions were brief, and the decisions were quick, so that we could soon return to the birds. People wondered whether there had been any meeting at all! Haftorn had a very good sense of humor, helping him to escape any situation with a smile. However, he did engage in some administrative work for the scientific community, such as being a member of the International Ornithological Committee. He also

initiated the journal *Ornis Norvegica*, and was its editor in chief from its start in 1978 (as *Fauna Norvegica Ser. C, Cinclus*) until his death. He had an ability for timing his efforts in an optimal way, for instance, helping him to establish, in Trondheim, the first chair for a professorship in ethology in Norway.

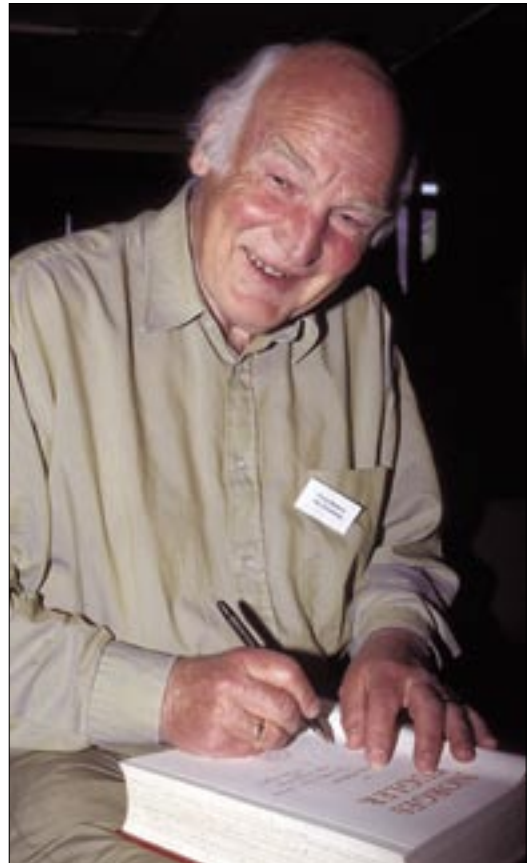
In 1974, Haftorn initiated a social gathering of ornithologists at the University of Trondheim and called the group «Daphila». He invited us to regular evening meetings in a small apartment that his family had in Trondheim. Here we could spend the whole evening talking about our favourite birds with no interruptions. After a while, the meetings were rotated between our homes. However, it was always something special to come to Eva and Svein's home at Målsjøen, where we could sit in the dining room with a beautiful view of the small lake outside and watch the tits visiting the nest-boxes and the feeding tables just outside the window. Haftorn told us of his latest results, and proudly showed us his home office, with the latest buys of cameras and computers. What an inspiration! These gatherings have continued until now, and among the more permanent members have been Randi Eidsmo Reinertsen, Yngve Espmark, Olav Hogstad, Arne Moksnes, Eivin Røskaft, Nils Røv, Tore Slagsvold and Bernt Erik Sæther.

Haftorn was a key person in the initiation of The Norwegian Ornithological Society in 1957 and was its president during 1958-1966. In fact, he envisioned such a society already several years before it became a reality. The life of the society, both on the national level, and on the local level in Trondheim, was always close to his heart. Although in poor health, he even attended the annual national meeting shortly before his death. Haftorn was a self-evident lifelong member of honour of the society, and during the funeral, a moving tribute was presented by the president of the society, Alv Otter Folkestad. Folkestad remarked on the resemblance between Haftorn and a huge pine tree of our mountain forests: it is the most majestic and impressive tree, and

possesses a strong inner core, enabling it to stand up against storms for hundreds of years even after it has died.

Birds were the passion of Svein's life but one interest was even stronger, his devotion to his dear wife, Eva, and to his four children, and their families. Eva made Svein have a good social life outside the forest and the world of birds. His friends, the research community, and avian science in general, are most grateful that Eva allowed Svein to spend so much time with us and with the birds.

*Tore Slagsvold*



*Svein Haftorn signing his monumental book *Norges Fugler* (1971) in Trysil May 2000. Photo: Jørn Thol-lefsen.*

## Publication list for Svein Haftorn

- 1944 Meiseflokkene i skogen høst og vinter. *Naturen 1944 (1)*: 18-29.
- 1944 Hamstring hos meiser. *Naturen 1944 (2)*: 58-63.
- 1945 Fuglekongens reir. *Naturen 1945 (3)*: 73-85.
- 1948 Om toppmeisas forplantningsforhold. *Naturen 1948 (4-5)*: 3-28.
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- 1950 Spurveugle, *Glaucidium p. passerinum* (L.), hamstrer fuglekonge. *Fauna 1950 (3)*: 111-112.
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- 1956 Contribution to the food biology of tits especially about storing of surplus food. Part II. The coal-tit (*Parus a. ater* L.). *K. norske Vidensk. Selsk. Skr. 1956 (2)*: 1-52.
- 1956 Contribution to the food biology of tits especially about storing of surplus food. Part III. The willow-tit (*Parus atricapillus* L.). *K. norske Vidensk. Selsk. Skr. 1956 (3)*: 1-79.
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