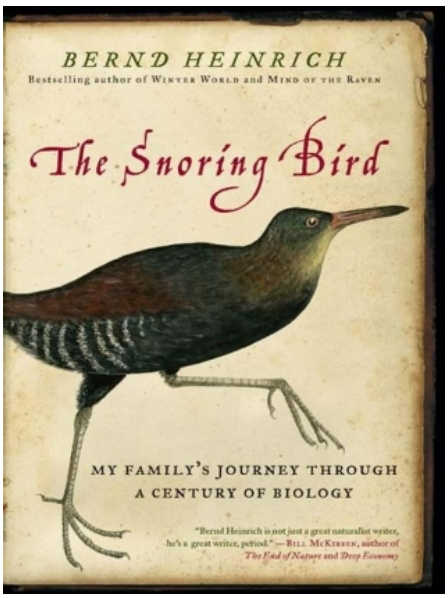

The Snoring Bird: My Family's Journey Through a Century of Biology

Bernd Heinrich

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Although Gerd Heinrich, a devoted naturalist, specialized in wasps, Bernd Heinrich tried to distance himself from his "old-fashioned" father, becoming a hybrid: a modern, experimental biologist with a naturalist's sensibilities.

In this extraordinary memoir, the award-winning author shares the ways in which his relationship with his father, combined with his unique childhood, molded him into the scientist, and man, he is today. From Gerd's days as a soldier in Europe and the family's daring escape from the Red Army in 1945 to the rustic Maine farm they came to call home, Heinrich relates it all in his trademark style, making science accessible and awe-inspiring.

The Snoring Bird: My Family's Journey Through a Century of Biology Details

Date	:	Published (first published 2007)
ISBN	:	
Author	:	Bernd Heinrich
Format	:	Kindle Edition 512 pages
Genre	:	Environment, Nature, Nonfiction, Science, Autobiography, Memoir, Animals, Birds, Biography, Natural History

From Reader Review The Snoring Bird: My Family's Journey Through a Century of Biology for online ebook

Jeff DeRosa says

My three star rating is a bit misleading because The Snoring Bird is written in two parts; and part one is a very different book than part two. Part one of this book is outstanding.

Part One, "The Old World," details the author's family history that led toward emigration to America. This journey spans two world wars from the perspective of, as the author says, "the losing side." The result is a fascinating mix of natural and political history that should not be missed. If this book concluded after part one, I would rate this book five stars. Reading part one is well worth it.

Part Two, "The New World," leaves something to be desired. Much of the details in this section have already been told in the author's other book, "Why We Run." I therefore did not need the repetition. I was also disappointed because I love Bernd Heinrich's work. However, part two of this book caused me to walk away with a lesser opinion of this author as a person. Many of us have difficult relationships (for various reasons) with our parents. However, the author's one-sided telling of his own relationship with "Papa" left a sour taste in my mouth. Particularly because, as we subtly learn from brief revelations about the author's own relationships with his wives and children, the author himself is perhaps quite similar to his own father; a father he works hard to criticize in a tone that often comes across as mere whining.

Dennis McDonald says

Review of Part 1

I'm almost finished with Part 1 of this fascinating book. It is one of the best example of a "true life adventure" I have ever read.

The scope of the tale is very broad and at times reads like fiction. The author describes his family's origins as well-off but hard-working landowners in rural Poland. Part one focuses on his father's experiences as an amateur and then professional biologist, as a lover of multiple women, as a world traveling naturalist, as a soldier, and as a leader in helping the family escape to America following Germany's collapse after World War II.

Throughout the book we're entertained and informed with fascinating details about birds, insects, animal behavior, constant travel, and survival -- and escape -- from dangerous situations almost too numerous to mention.

The early parts of the book are reconstructed not just from the author’s childhood memories but from letters, conversations with relatives and friends, and from examination of family artifacts. Especially touching is the author having a distant childhood memory of finding an especially exotic wasp when he was five years old confirmed in 2003 and seeing in his late father’s handwriting an acknowledgement of his son’s role in the discovery.

The adventures of the author’s father in hunting and collecting rare birds in foreign lands equipped with little more than a shotgun, binoculars, and a compass are worthy of a book just on their own. Into this narrative the

author weaves the father's disciplined approach to wasp collecting as well as the father's unique relationship with women. At the same time we see what it was like to grow up in an free and stimulating environment where scientific curiosity was not just encouraged but expected.

The author does not shortchange describing the roles of the many women in his life -- the mother, the mistress, his sister, servants, and relatives -- all receive attention.

In addition to the scientific details we also see what it was like to live in a pre-electronic era undergoing economic, social, and political upheaval. Especially unnerving are the family's adventures during and immediately following World War II as they leave everything behind and move East to escape the oncoming Russian army as they fear what happens to intellectuals, landowners, and the educated classes in a defeated country.

That's where I am now at the end of Part One. I started reading the book borrowed from the library, then I bought a used paper copy from Amazon, now I have a Kindle edition to read while traveling. Can Part Two live up to Part One? We'll see.

Review of Part 2

The second half of the book is devoted to the author's growing up and becoming an academic scientist. Where the first half of the book concentrates on his father's family's adventures in Europe and in wartime (WWII) and international expeditions, Part 2 now shifts to the author's own experiences starting with the his family's somewhat rocky adjustment to life in America.

Many words are devoted to the author's fascination as a boy and young man with animals and insects of all kinds and how, despite having an aloof father, he inherits his father's disciplined approach to research and study.

A major difference between the father and son emerges. This provides the basis for much of the dramatic interest of the second half of the book.

The father's research interests consist of physically collecting and identifying different species of birds and insects and describing sometimes minute physical characteristics related to color, shape, and body parts. The author himself is more of an experimentalist and comes into academia at a time when studies of animal behavior and genetics were undergoing profound change. His description of "bee lining" as a boy is a precursor of a research orientation.

The differences between the two approaches to scientific research provide some dramatic tension but the author avoids oversimplifying his relationship with his father and in the process sensitively explores their overlapping worldviews.

An interesting sub-theme throughout the second half of the book is the author's relationship with women. His father in Europe flourished at a time when it was possible for a man to manage multiple simultaneous relationships including what we traditionally referred to as "mistresses." In part 2 the author describes his own marriages and how his dogged focus on scientific field research in the field contributed to two marriage failures.

The scientific and family tales of the father and son are interesting enough by themselves to be the basis for two books. The thoughtful way the author brings the two stories together truly makes this book unique. Recommended.

Anna Mussmann says

This memoir tells multiple stories. The first (and, for me, by far the most fascinating) is an account of the author's family history. His grandparents were owners of an estate in a part of Prussia that was given to Poland after World War I, became German again during World War II, and was transformed into a communist collective after the Yalta Conference. His father was a World War I flying ace (invited to join the Red Baron's squadron), a naturalist and fiercely intrepid explorer, and an autocrat in personal life. The author himself, along with his family, barely managed to escape falling into the hands of the Red Army (by whom they would most likely have been shot because of their social status and education) or being stuck behind the Iron Curtain after World War II.

The second tale is that of the author's own education and upbringing in 1950's and '60's America.

The third is that of the author's adult scientific career and discoveries, plus reflections on the relationship between his father's life work as a naturalist and his own career.

I recommend the first section of the book. The history is fascinating. The second was also somewhat interesting, but the third felt as if it should have been more heavily edited and abbreviated. I also found myself liking the author less and less as he revealed that, like his father before him, he was not very good at maintaining personal family relationships or of staying faithful to a wife. I also found his mini-lectures on politics and evolution to be more annoying than illuminating. Overall, however, I'm glad I read this.

Joanna says

This is an amazing book. It covers a lot of ground, and does so thoroughly. I enjoyed reading about the author's father's coming of age and history, and learned a lot about World War I while doing so. I learned a lot about taxidermy, and natural history, and wasps, and Expeditions. Then we moved into the story of the family, and as Bernd was growing up I was fascinated by the experiences he had as a young boy growing up in as an immigrant American. It was especially fun to read about Maine and Vermont as outlandish places. And then to read of his life as a young man, and a father himself. I am amazed by how much the family as a whole was able to accomplish despite siginificant adversity. Many times they lived in conditions that I would not think conducive to survival, and yet they thrived. Tremendous.

My favorite parts were the descriptions of Bernd's work as a graduate student. I think I will be reading some of his other work soon. I loved everything he had to say about ravens and honeybees!

For some reason it took me a dreadfully long time to read this book. Even though I really enjoyed all the parts, it did seem awfully easy to set it aside. I believe that is due to the scope of the subject matter. Each time I put it down and came back, it was almost as though I was reading a different book by the same author. It felt like it went on forever. The parts were all tied together as a family history, but they were quite disparate.

Dennis McDonald says

Review of Part 1 (published July 15, 2017)

I'm almost finished with Part 1 of this fascinating book. It is one of the best example of a "true life adventure" I have ever read.

The scope of the tale is very broad and at times reads like fiction. The author describes his family's origins as well-off but hard-working landowners in rural Poland. Part one focuses on his father's experiences as an amateur and then professional biologist, as a lover of multiple women, as a world traveling naturalist, as a soldier, and as a leader in helping the family escape to America following Germany's collapse after World War II.

Throughout the book we're entertained and informed with fascinating details about birds, insects, animal behavior, constant travel, and survival -- and escape -- from dangerous situations almost too numerous to mention.

The early parts of the book are reconstructed not just from the author’s childhood memories but from letters, conversations with relatives and friends, and from examination of family artifacts. Especially touching is the author having a distant childhood memory of finding an especially exotic wasp when he was five years old confirmed in 2003 and seeing in his late father’s handwriting an acknowledgement of his son’s role in the discovery.

The adventures of the author’s father in hunting and collecting rare birds in foreign lands equipped with little more than a shotgun, binoculars, and a compass are worthy of a book just on their own. Into this narrative the author weaves the father's disciplined approach to wasp collecting as well as the father's unique relationship with women. At the same time we see what it was like to grow up in an free and stimulating environment where scientific curiosity was not just encouraged but expected.

The author does not shortchange describing the roles of the many women in his life -- the mother, the mistress, his sister, servants, and relatives -- all receive attention.

In addition to the scientific details we also see what it was like to live in a pre-electronic era undergoing economic, social, and political upheaval. Especially unnerving are the family's adventures during and immediately following World War II as they leave everything behind and move East to escape the oncoming Russian army as they fear what happens to intellectuals, landowners, and the educated classes in a defeated country.

That's where I am now at the end of Part One. I started reading the book borrowed from the library, then I bought a used paper copy from Amazon, now I have a Kindle edition to read while traveling. Can Part Two live up to Part One? We'll see.

Review of Part 2 (published August 1, 2017)

The second half of the book is devoted to the author's growing up and becoming an academic scientist. Where the first half of the book concentrates on his father's family's adventures in Europe and in wartime (WWII) and international expeditions, Part 2 now shifts to the author's own experiences starting with the his family's somewhat rocky adjustment to life in America.

Many words are devoted to the author's fascination as a boy and young man with animals and insects of all kinds and how, despite having an aloof father, he inherits his father's disciplined approach to research and study.

A major difference between the father and son emerges. This provides the basis for much of the dramatic interest of the second half of the book.

The father's research interests consist of physically collecting and identifying different species of birds and insects and describing sometimes minute physical characteristics related to color, shape, and body parts. The author himself is more of an experimentalist and comes into academia at a time when studies of animal behavior and genetics were undergoing profound change. His description of "bee lining" as a boy is a precursor of a research orientation.

The differences between the two approaches to scientific research provide some dramatic tension but the author avoids oversimplifying his relationship with his father and in the process sensitively explores their overlapping worldviews.

An interesting sub-theme throughout the second half of the book is the author's relationship with women. His father in Europe flourished at a time when it was possible for a man to manage multiple simultaneous relationships including what we traditionally referred to as "mistresses." In part 2 the author describes his own marriages and how his dogged focus on scientific field research in the field contributed to two marriage failures.

The scientific and family tales of the father and son are interesting enough by themselves to be the basis for two books. The thoughtful way the author brings the two stories together truly makes this book unique. Recommended.

Nola says

The writing is wonderful. Heinrich is very readable. The subject matter, on the other hand, is some of the most amazing characters, feats, and ideals of which I have heard. Heinrich discovers some of this history of his family himself for the first time,which heightens the emotional pull of the book. The history includes both the tragedy of war and the self-inflicted hardships of years of specimen collecting in distant, disease-plagued areas. The latter were undertaken when communication and transportation were so less developed than now that distant areas were truly remote and dangerous. Having not heard about these expeditions before, I really learned about the era when naturalists went on expeditions to collect for museums. Heinrich's father had fanatical dedication to these expeditions. He was happy only when he was exploring wild foreign land, even though the hardships are far beyond what I could take. I thought women of that time (mid 1900's) were adverse to any kind of outdoor roughing it, but the women that Heinrich's father took with him enjoyed the expeditions as much as he did, which is another story.
The war stories from both world wars show Heinrich's father, again, as an extraordinary person. They also show what civilian life was like during that time period, something I have never read much about before. I had not appreciated the difficulties normal people faced in Europe.
As a child, Heinrich learned much about nature from his father. Heinrich's father studied ichneumon wasps with astounding passion. However, he was absent for most of Heinrich's childhood, and showed very little interest in his son's well-being. On the other hand,he had almost brutally high expectations and he did write copious detailed letters to his son. He is difficult to understand, and Heinrich does a good job of sharing the fascination he engenders.
It is hard to express how exciting this book is. Between Heinrich's and his family's extraordinary lives and the fortuitous twists and turns that bring Heinrich to the discovery of the part of this history that he didn't know, it is hard to put the book down.

Beth says

Memoirs don’t usually strike me as fast paced and action packed, but this one was. From stories of specimen collecting in Africa to the account of two women’s flight from the Red Army after WWII with two toddlers in tow, this story is breathtaking. I found it difficult to put down.

I initially picked up this book after reading *The Mind of the Raven* by the same author. It left me intrigued about Bernd Heinrich’s story — what sort of person spends his life studying wildlife with such intensity — even to the point of physical hardship? As I made my way through the pages of this narrative, I found that Bernd’s story couldn’t be fully understood without the history of his family as well. The memoir is equally about the author’s father — an avid taxonomist who lived in Germany during both world wars and eventually immigrated to America. I found it to be riveting on many levels: as a glimpse into the life of a German family during the first half of the twentieth century, as an account of two men whose lives were committed to the natural world around them despite the changing trends and practices of the scientific world, and most of all as a vivid portrait of remarkable people living out lives that would seem utterly implausible in the pages of a novel.

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If you appreciated this review, check out my blog at pagesandmargins.wordpress.com

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Bill Yates says

I started the book yesterday and finished it this evening. That says more than any words I can write. I was carried along by the fascinating biographical details, the firsthand account of the horrors of World War II, and by the interesting descriptions of nature and the inhabitants of the natural world.

Maggie says

Fascinating and wide ranging. Natural history, WWII Poland/Germany, growing up in Maine, studying the temperature regulation of bees, the cataloging of wasps, running for 24 hours. So much.

I do wish I could find a recording of the "distinctive seven-note Heinrich whistle" that the family used as signal when separated in the woods - it intrigues me.

Phil says

There has not been a Heinrich book I’ve read that I was totally captivated by it. This book is certainly no different though quite different in the nature of its subject from his other work.

This book deals with two subjects, his father’s life and how he himself became the writer and scientist he is. Both are fascinating stories in themselves.

Gerd Heinrich was born in 1896 in Berlin. His father was a physician and his mother the heiress to a 3300 acre farm in Borowke, Poland. Borowke was a beautiful setting for him to grow up in especially with his budding interest in everything in nature.

After his graduation from the Gymnasium in Berlin, he visited the curator of entomology at a museum and asked him what insect was least study. He was told the parasitic wasps of the Ichneumonidae family.

During the reading of the book, I had come to the conclusion Bernd's father was not a very good man but by the end of the book I had amended my judgement of him. He was a highly unusual, difficult and obsessed human being.

During the First World War, he enlisted as a cavalryman fighting along the eastern front and by the end of the war was flying planes.

At the end of the war, he married and with his wife and her sister made several excursions across the world including a very hard trip to Burma collection skins of birds, shrews, mice, rats and other animals for museums around the world but each trip had another reason which was the main reason, collecting hundreds and hundreds of Ichneumon species, studying them, pinning them and eventually cataloguing them.

He published books on his finds which, of course, by nature of the subject matter had few readers.

The rise of Hitler alarmed him and he immediately began making plans as he sensed another world war was coming. With the war, though in his forties, he was drafted into the army. Due to his age and ability with languages he never had to see battle and through his administrative abilities was able to save several others from having to go near the fighting.

After the war he had to protect his family from the invading Russian army, a seemingly unsurmountable task and what an amazing tale of survival it was.

Eventually he was able to get his wife, sister-in-law and children (Bernd was one of them) safely away with the help of scientific friends across Europe and the United States but he lost Borowke.

After years of impoverishment, he was able to immigrate to the US and settled in Maine, a place that shaped the life of his son, Bernd.

Bernd's tale is as fascinating as that of his father. Without formal scientific training, he was drawn to the study of animal behavior. After years of study, the ability to ask the interesting questions began to emerge which has given us all the wonderful books he has written.

A quote from Sir Peter Medawar he includes sums up the reason for his own success:

"One does not have to be terribly brainy to be a good scientist. One would do better for owning some of those old fashion virtues—application, diligence, a sense of purpose, the power to concentrate, to preserver and not to be cast down by adversity."

The relationship between father and son was never cordial. There was always a strain that often led to arguments. Both were obsessed by their scientific work and since those obsessions seldom overlapped, they seldom collaborated with the exception of one last trip to Africa in 1963 in which Bernd took a year off of college to help him collect.

But toward the end of the book, Bernd is defending his father from those who work with DNA that labeled him (quite unkindly and sometimes to his face) as nothing but a stamp collector. By the end of Gerd's life collecting had gone out of vogue.

Here is a quote from Bernd's defense of his father's work:

“The DNA shows us we are all kin, to varying degrees, but what matters—differentiating species is no so much how much DNA is shared or not shared, but more important, what the DNA does. At least theoretically, there is no lower limit to the number of base sequences that need to differ to differentiate species according to the ecological concept that is the ultimate basis that defines a species.”

After he scatters his father’s ashes across the fields on the small, family farm in Maine begins summing up the lives of all the people mentioned in the book that were involved with him and his father. It should come as no surprise that all four of Bernd’s children by three marriages are scientists.

The legacy continues.

Sandy says

I picked this up because Heinrich was the commencement speaker at my son's graduation this year. I didn't know who he was so I figured I ought to read something by him (for the record, he is a better writer than commencement speaker). It's taken a while -- this is not a short book. It's a fascinating read though it tends to drag toward the end.

It's a memoir -- both a biography of Heinrich's naturalist father, Gerd, with whom he has a contentious relationship, and an autobiography of Bernd himself and how he came to be a famous ecological biologist. I think I would have a contentious relationship with both of them but they are interesting people. "Papa" served in two World Wars on the German side but wasn't a Nazi and the first half of the book is his story. The second half of the book is Bernd and family's life in the post-war years, the family's immigration to America and Bernd's adjusting to life in America and then adulthood and development as a biologist.

One of the long-running themes in this book is the change in the biological sciences from naturalism and collecting/identifying new species to experimental biology focusing on behavior and the scientific process. It's a major change but Heinrich does a good job of showing how these are not isolated trends and how they need each other. Aside from their just generally interesting lives, seeing this change in the course of two generations in one family really brings out both the change and interconnectedness of it all. I would definitely recommend this for people who have an interest in science. I feel I know a lot more about wasps now.

Linda says

So engrossing that I've already ordered two other titles by Bernd Heinrich from the library: "Mind of the Raven," and "Ravens in Winter." And so engrossing that I finished all 461 pages (including every footnote and reference, cutline, intro and epilogue) in four nights of staying up late reading.

Bernd Heinrich's memoir combines high drama with astute observation and attention to detail, especially in the natural world. It's ostensibly the story of his father's charmed life on an almost magical country estate before and between both World Wars. Much of the story takes place within the shifting borders of Germany and Poland where the senior Heinrich is a naturalist whose speciality is wasps.

But he also goes on numerous expeditions around the world collecting assorted animals (dead and alive) for zoos, museums and his personal collections. The snoring bird of the book's title is one of them. His

companions include his wife(s) and lovers and eventually his son in a menagerie that is as amazing as any of the experiences they encounter in jungles and on mountaintops.

It is also a story of war, devastation, displacement and starting life over in small-town New England after the family finally makes it out of Europe alive. The close calls and miraculous rescues that happen again and again could only occur in real life. They would be frowned upon in fiction as too improbable.

But perhaps, most of all, this the story of a son trying all his life to please his father, to understand him and finally to break away to pursue science in a world that's incomprehensible to his father.

One of Bernd Heinrich's talents is to make science and natural history understandable to the general reader. So while there is a fair amount of science, I usually could follow it and, more often than not, found it fascinating. (BH got two Golden Fleece awards from Proxmire!) for his research.

If nothing else, the book was eye-opening in the long quote by Hermann Goring (delivered at the Nuremberg Trials) about how you convince a nation to go to war. Karl Rove and company clearly knew where to look when they foisted Iraq on the American people.

Eleanor Lux says

This is my most favorite book in the last 5 years by my most favorite writer. I have loved all his books about animals and nature but this one also brought in another view of personal history I had never been exposed to.

Alison says

A memoir by biologist/environmental ecologist/writer Bernd Heinrich, best known for his books on raven behavior. It follows the history of his German-Polish family, especially the life of his father Gerd, through two world wars and over to America. Gerd was a specialist on the taxonomy of ichneumon wasps (look them up) and a collector of museum specimens (mostly birds and small mammals), two pursuits (really obsessions) that took him on many expeditions all over the world. Bernd reflects on how his father's preoccupation with an always obscure and increasingly old-fashioned branch of the sciences affected their family, and his father's disappointment in him when he chose a more energetic, experiment-driven approach to the study of biology. (Note that he never even considered taking a path that was NOT that of a scientist--like business school, for example. Was it genetics or was it environment? As the historian daughter of two historians, I can't say myself.)

Bernd is more like Gerd than he would probably admit in another way as well--an overwhelming male chauvinism. The pages of this memoir abound with mentions of wives, girlfriends, and daughters bullied, manipulated, and most of all pushed aside and neglected. The most appalling example on the part of Gerd: his son (Bernd) was born just before WWII, and was actually the child of his Polish mistress, Hilde. He went to a lot of trouble to disguise Hilde as a German, put her through a Nazi state-funded program that supported unwed mothers, and then "take in" the baby with his real wife Anneliese, who was Hilde's employer. But then Hilde almost immediately got pregnant again, and they could not do the same song and dance as before again, so they smuggled her out of town and she had the baby with friends in another city. Then Gerd *wrote her that he had met another woman and wanted to marry her.* If the other woman had not refused that offer, Bernd writes, he and his mother and newborn sister (not to mention Anneliese!) would have been destitute and would probably not have survived the war. He later ended up marrying Hilde and used her as his

secretary and assistant on all of his expeditions, while still having various affairs. Bernd makes no excuses for his father's past behavior as he describes how he exploited and cheated on all the various women in his life, sort of a "must get it all down for posterity" approach. Then he mentions fairly casually how his own obsession with tracking the behavior of birds and bees (while his then-wives raised his young children) cost him two marriages--all in one chapter, mostly filled with details about what he learned from the bugs. Yeah. Sorry Bernd, you haven't done anything nearly as bad as almost abandon a woman in wartime Germany, but I think you earned those divorces.

Beth Maddaus says

Up until December, 2007, I thought that the blogosphere was a place for people to discuss their political interests or their health concerns and since I had neither, I had never ventured in. But, a conversation one night at a dinner party with Amity peaked my interest. The next day, I discovered that I could search for blogs through igoogle using keywords. Well, I had just finished reading The Winter World for the third time and decided to search blogs using the author's name. I typed in Bernd Heinrich and found Jennifer's blog A Passion for Nature and from there links to many other wonderful nature blogs and with a sigh of relief, found the place in cyberspace where I belong.

Bernd Heirnrich is one of my favorite authors for many reasons, chiefly, he is a good story teller and is able to explain scientific processes so that a lawyer with an undergraduate degree in math can understand. His explanations and descriptions of the natural world don't simply satisfy curiosity, they stoke it.

From reading many of his books, I have found places where our lives have kind of been tangent lines and that lends an interesting piece, too. In the early 1980's, I was working my way through the University of Vermont as a secretary in the Microbiology and Biochemistry Department. One of my duties was to make coffee at 10:00 every morning because many of the professors and researchers in life sciences would get together for a forum and discussion over coffee in our conference room. Whether my memory has invented it after reading so many of his books or whether he really was occasionally part of that coffee group, I'm not really sure. But, I think he was and how I wish that I had paid more attention to the conversations in that group and less attention to whether or not it was an infringement of my rights to be expected to make coffee.

The cabin in Weld, Maine, that Bernd often writes about is up the road from me and, in fact, when he was training for the ultra marathon that he wrote about in Why We Run, he used to run right by our house and turn around at the corner of Route 2 and Weld Street. That was long before I lived here but he told me about it in an e-mail correspondence.

As a teenager, Bernd spent many years living at Good Will Hinkley, a place where I spend a fair amount of time because of the young people that I work with who are in foster care and placed there.

But, aside from those superficial tangential connections, I cannot claim any similarity to Bernd Henrich. He is a rare genius with a gift for sharing his genius with the common man and his most recent book does just that by combining natural history, European history, scientific discovery, family dynamics, the will to survive and the desire to excel into a fascinating read.

A few months ago, Charlie bought me The Snoring Bird: My Family's Journey Through a Century of Biology and, honestly, I feel that any description that I can give of this book is such a vast oversimplification that it might be better to not even try. But, I will.

The book starts out with the history of the Henrich family on their estate in Germany/Poland. Bernd's father

Gerd has the heart and mind of a naturalist and a passion for collecting ichneumon wasps but his genteel life as a collector is interrupted by first one world war and then another. In between the wars, he travels the world collecting birds and mammals for museum collections. As World War II draws to a close, the family must flee the encroaching Russian Army and four year old Bernd along with an assortment of family members take refuge for five years in the Hohenwald Forest. It is here that Bernd discovers his own passion for the natural world. Eventually the family makes their way to the United States and to Maine.

The ichneumon wasps are as much a character of this book as any of the people and the creation, burial and resurrection of the collection is as dramatic as any rescue that Hollywood could cook up. The coincidences and serendiptous discoveries that allow Bernd Henrich to discover so much of his family's history are almost incredulous but are actually the result of a dilligent and disciplined researcher.

The book is written honestly, no one, including the author, is spared from a realistic portrayal. The book is full of real people with passions, energy, curiousity and flaws.

If I was a reviewer with a rating system, I would give it 5 stars and tell some smart producer to buy the movie rights. It is truly a story with an appeal that goes beyond the community of nature bloggers and right to the essence of the 20th century.
