

Ornithology – Men and our feathered friends

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Flightiness, mating dances or twittery chatter – Similarities between bird and man

Women often liken men to pigs or stray dogs. But members of the male population actually have more in common with birds, knows Louise Stein.

On one of those recent late-summer evenings, I sat on the patio of a popular Munich restaurant with a few friends. We enjoyed the balmy evening breeze, sparkly champagne and light-hearted small talk. In no time we were talking about the state of the world – more or less the pouting Kurt Beck, renegade Abkhazia and aging playboy Boris Becker's second marriage – and at some point landed inevitably on the subject of men and women. And sex.

My husband, the strange bird

The conversation ran on in a harmless-friendly manner, then my girlfriend F. suddenly crowed euphorically: “you absolutely have to, Louise, in your column, write of dating, mating, and manhandling!” Horrified, I tore the half-empty glass of Pommery out of the dear's hand, while the rest of the affectedly bashful table quickly attempted to divert the conversation to the subject of “North Korea's chief evil-doer Kim Jong Il just had a stroke”. The distinguished senior couple at the neighboring table, meanwhile, put down their spaghetti forks with disapproving looks. Uptight, pah! girlfriend F. shot back and enlightened us with gusto, on the fact that we didn't have a clue about literature trends: “Dating, Mating, and Manhandling. The Ornithological Guide to Men” is the name of the just-published book (G. Kieppenheuer Publishers, 14,95 Euro) by the American, Lauren Frances.

Behind this purposely suggestive title hides a reference guide described by the author as an “ornithological guide” to catching men. The curvy Californian, type Pamela Anderson as a brunette, claims to have discovered similarities between fowl and men. Even if the lords of creation sometimes act as rowdy as neighbor's poodle, and at times behave like piglets, it is a fallacy of the female world, to notoriously compare guys with dogs and pigs. Men have much more in common with birds – claims the Love expert, who coached Hollywood celebs (Kate Walsh, Rocker Tommy Lee) on the subject of couple behavior. Whether flightiness, mating dances, twittery chatter or screamer-syndrome – countless are the similarities between our feathered friends and XY-chromosome carriers.

Gathering of the Puffers: Bragging at any price

The book wants to teach bird whisperers, how to “Get men to eat out of your hand” and decode the mating patterns and hang-ups of the strangest, most colorful or over-bred birds (mama's boys!). Relationship guides about the everlasting malaise between man and woman are of course nothing new. In the USA, motherland of the confusing love-help book (for instance “Men are like Fish”, “Why the Nicest Men have the Worst Women”), Lauren Frances' moody discourse about single- and problem birds was still a hit.

To each female her bird

To say it up-front: I myself suspect, that literary ornithology is equally insufficient for catching the right one, as a lecture of the print „The Way to Becoming a Sex-Goddess“ or the cook books of Alfred Biolk. But the entertaining Ornithological Guide at least offered me a new awareness of the male world. Paging through the chapter “Bird watching in super markets, pool halls or strip joints”, there on the pages was a compilation of the funniest feathered creatures:

*The Long-tailed Bush Warbler. Sex-symbol, addicted to validation, let’s say, Mick Jagger.

*The Bald Starling. Aging gentleman, bald, penchant for 20-year younger muses, tendency for dominance. Frequently to be found among the Russian oligarchy or American hedge fund millionaires.

*The Elegant Parrot. Metro-sexual, fashion aficionado. Environment: In front of the mirror. A`la David Beckham or Marius Müller-Westernhagen.

*The Arctic Skua (sometimes known as Parasitic Gull). Doesn’t like to wash, takes over the partner’s couch, car and bank card. Hard to get rid of. Type Pete Doherty.

*The Stiff-tail Duck. The name is self-explanatory.

The bird in the hand...

That the poor duck is thusly denigrated is not a nice move on Ms. Frances’ part – bird species play a respectable role in Greek mythology, after all, from the eagle to the simple sparrow. A pretty booklet titled “Sex in the Animal Kingdom” also roused my passion for feathered creatures. The prude Mute Swan is monogamous for life, I read there, the South-American Club-winged Manakin does it with everyone and the lazy Dunnock male would rather let the female chirp, than to initiate his own courtship display.

What this kind of knowledge is good for? Well, even if it doesn’t work out with catching a marriageable bird – at least it’ll be easier to find some fun in boring business meetings or bland parties, if you secretly study whether your male counterpart is a Great Crested Grebe, desperate for show effects, a testosterone-laden Turkey or more of a foolish Bullfinch.