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BINOCULARS, CAMERAS, AND NATURE FILMS: PATHS TO A NEW SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING

As Kristof Nyiri (2003) has pointed out, the pictorial approaches to scientific understanding can be seen as a beginning of a new scientific revolution (definitely similar in depth to the earlier literary or textual revolution in philosophy and sciences). I think that this idea can be most plastically demonstrated by the history and philosophy of so-called classical ethology. Unlike the basic illustrative and research resources used almost exclusively within history and philosophy of science in the first two thirds of the last century (namely physics, astronomy and some chemistry), ethology is a *substantially* pictorial scientific research area – from the very beginning to its recent resurgent. Accordingly, from its birth the scientific status of ethology is highly controversial, probably just because of this special feature. In fact, my conviction is that this slightly strange situation is due to the fact that the scientific study of highly complex behavioral patterns of animals (and as far as it is concerned, of our own species) is a discipline deeply attached to the newly available pictorial research tools and methods. The emergence of modern ethology is inseparable from advancements in optical technologies. Field glasses, cameras, photos and films play a pivotal role in the development of human and non-human ethology undetectable in any other scientific discipline. Today this tendency is clearly further strengthened by new kinds of mobile communication. My main objective is to turn our attention to this rather neglected scientific area as a paradigmatic example of the basic role of pictures in our cognitive processes in general as well as in our scientific life in particular. Furthermore, I would like to stress the potential lying in investigating the history of ethology to unfold unique characteristics of Central-Eastern European history of ideas from which classical ethology has mainly emerged.