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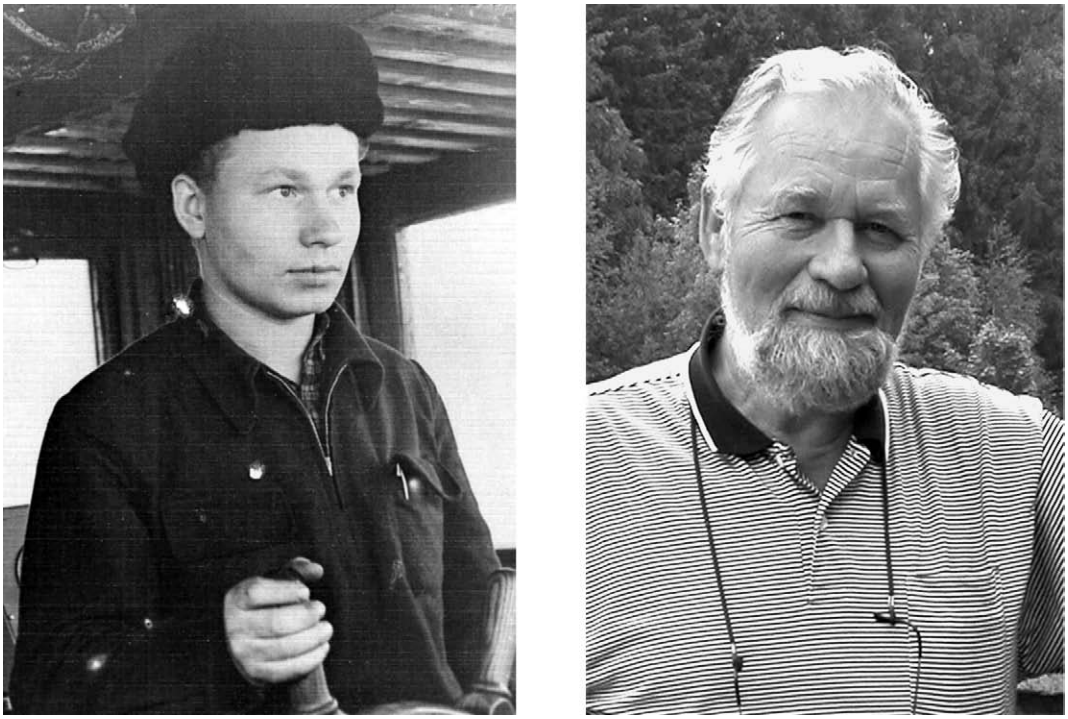
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IN MEMORIAM: EVGENY N. KUROCHKIN, 1940–2011

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Evgeny N. Kurochkin, 1940–2011.
Aboard ship in the Pacific in 1959; in Moscow ca. 2007. Photographers unknown.

Evgeny Kurochkin, a member of the AOU since 2001, became an Honorary Fellow in 2005. He was born in Moscow on 12 June 1940, and he died there on 13 December 2011 at the age of 71. His career was launched in that nursery of many famous Russian zoologists, the Young Biologists Club of the Moscow Zoo. He graduated from Moscow State University in 1964, and defended his doctoral dissertation in Kiev in 1968. Under the tutelage of the renowned Russian ornithologist Georgy Dementiev, Kurochkin studied avian paleontology and settled into a long and productive career in the Paleontological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Kurochkin published prolifically on Cenozoic fossil birds from the Paleocene to the Holocene, but his most passionate involvement was with late Mesozoic birds, particularly the so-called "opposite birds" (Enantiornithes). Perhaps his greatest pride, discovered on one of the Soviet-Mongolian paleontological expeditions to Mongolia, was at the time the oldest ornithuromorph bird, to which he gave the name *Ambiortus*. Evgeny never bought into the cladistic school of phylogenetic systematics, but he became embroiled in the bitter controversy over avian origins and developed his own theory of a biphyletic origin of birds.

Fossil birds cannot be identified without comparative skeletons of modern birds, and one of Evgeny's crowning achievements was building a world-class skeleton collection at the Institute. This grew through his own collecting efforts, which began at least as early as 1959 when he collected seabirds on a vessel in the Pacific, and those of his students and associates. As the collection increased in size and importance, its diversity was enhanced through exchanges of great mutual benefit to both parties. Skeletons of rare birds from central Asia were welcomed by curators of museums who could offer skeletons of orders and families of birds not present in Eurasia. The collection that resulted in Moscow is probably the most useful for paleontological comparisons of any avian skeleton collection outside of Britain and North America.

Evgeny visited the United States first in 1982, when he worked in the Smithsonian collections and stayed with me and my family in Arlington, Virginia. I got the impression that he was not

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very satisfied by the multicultural nature of much of the cuisine he was offered in our home, but he did become rapturous over barbecued spareribs, which he declared that "only a man could cook." It was during this time that we visited the fossil bird locality at the Lee Creek phosphate mine in North Carolina, although with some trepidation as we were uncertain that the U.S. State Department would approve his roaming so far from the Washington area. In 1992, he was among several avian paleontologists who came together coincidentally at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York in time to view the skeleton of the Cretaceous vertebrate that came to be known as *Mononykus* and which was being highly touted by AMNH paleontologists as a bizarre bird. Evegeny pooh-poohed all the fuss, saying that he had found the same creature himself in Mongolia and was highly excited by it until he realized it was not a bird, after which he had no further interest in it. Nevertheless, the New York crowd soon shamelessly promoted *Mononykus* as a vital link in the evolution of birds. It even appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine replete with bogus feathers for which there was not a shred of evidence. But Evgeny was right, and the promoters of *Mononykus* eventually had to recant and admit as quietly as possible that it was an alvarezsaurid dinosaur.

Evgeny and I had each been on field expeditions to Cuba, particularly in the east, and during the 1996 meeting of the Society of Avian Paleontology and Evolution in Washington, we enjoyed sharing experiences and recalling the names of obscure villages we had each visited, such as Yateritas. Evgeny's predominant emotion was enthusiasm; he loved what he was doing and it showed in the ever-present twinkle in his eye. He was an avid photographer, wanting to try to capture every experience and personality that he was not likely to encounter again. He was a cherished colleague, hoisted many a toast, and was always prompt and eager to answer correspondence. He was a credit to his science and his country.

I am most grateful to Nikita Zelenkov for supplying much basic biographical information and making many helpful comments on the manuscript.

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