

## IN MEMORIAM: RENÉ DE NAUROIS, 1906-2006

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Father René de Naurois, Corresponding Fellow of the AOU since 1971, passed away on 12 January 2006 in his 100th year. He was born on 24 November 1906 and spent his childhood on a large family estate near Toulouse in southern France. As a boy, he was attracted by nature and birds, naming himself a “*traîne-buisson*.” For most people except ornithologists, René de Naurois was famous first as a professor of theology and philosophy in the Catholic Institute of Toulouse, then as chaplain of the French army during World War II. He was among the first French to land on Ouistreham beach on 6 June 1944, which earned him the prestigious *Compagnon de la Libération*.

Although René de Naurois was interested in birds and nature from his childhood, not until 1954 did he become established as an ornithologist, with the publication of two papers on the raptors of the Toulouse area and of Morocco in *L'Oiseau et la Revue Française d'Ornithologie*. In 1959, with the encouragement of Noël Mayaud and Henri Heim de Balsac, he initiated a study on the avian communities of the coastal areas of northwestern Africa, from southern Morocco to Mauritania. He was the first to describe in detail the ornithology of the Banc d'Arguin, located south of Nouadhibou in Mauritania, with tens of thousands of pelicans, cormorants, herons, spoonbills, and flamingos and many species of larids (see Alauda 27: 241–308, 1959). Subsequently, de Naurois discovered and described the prominent role of these coastal areas and mudflats for myriad migrating and wintering species from Eurasia. He reported the first breeding colonies of Royal Terns in the Old World. Employed by the French *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*

between 1960 and 1971, his doctoral thesis entitled *Peuplements et cycles de reproduction des oiseaux de la côte occidentale d'Afrique* appeared in the *Mémoires du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle*, volume 56. This was a beautiful study in which bird communities were described with many details on the biology and ecology of several key species. This work provided insights into biogeographic issues on the border regions between the sea and the land, as well as between Afrotropical and Palaearctic realms. Subsequently, de Naurois proved to be an indefatigable explorer of regions of great ornithological interest, especially the Cape Verde islands. C. J. Hazevoet dedicated his book *The Birds of the Cape Verde Islands* (British Ornithologists' Union check-list, number 13, 1995) to de Naurois, “who has done more for Cape Verde ornithology than anyone else.” Particularly interested in islands, de Naurois spent much time and effort exploring New Caledonia and the Isles of Sao Tomé and Principe in the Gulf of Guinea.

Like many ornithologists of his generation, he came to birds through egg-collecting, and his collection was donated to the Natural History Museum of Geneva, Switzerland.

René de Naurois was a man full of spirit, energy, and generosity. His life was a long fight against all kinds of totalitarianism, and he participated in numerous political actions. Deeply impressed by the two world wars and passionately in love of freedom, he was a most likeable and exemplary person, fully aware that the 20th century his life almost spanned completely brought calamity; but also hope. His timely and touching war memoir, *Aumônier de la France Libre*, appeared in 2004.