

## **François Vuilleumier, 1938–2017**

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IN MEMORIAM

## François Vuilleumier, 1938–2017

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François Vuilleumier, an AOU Fellow, died on January 11, 2017, at the age of 78, at his home in Piermont, New York. A curator emeritus in the Division of Vertebrate Zoology–Ornithology at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), François was a biogeographer best known for his work on Andean birds. He became a member of the AOU in 1963, an Elective Member in 1970, and a Fellow in 1977.

François was born on November 26, 1938, in Berne, Switzerland. His father, Willy Vuilleumier, a professional animal sculptor and amateur naturalist, was an early influence. As a boy, François began to keep a field notebook and—inheriting his father's artistic bent—to make sketches of birds. His interest in birds was further stimulated by Swiss ornithologist Paul G eroudet, with whom he spent many hours in the field as a young man.

François received his early education at Coll ge Calvin and graduated from the University of Geneva. In 1963 he came to the United States for graduate study at the University of Illinois, working with S. Charles Kendeigh. While there he met Walter Bock, who introduced him to Ernst Mayr, under whose tutelage François earned his Ph.D.

At Harvard, François began to investigate the history of South American birds, focusing on the evolution and biogeography of Andean species. Conceptualizing the Andes as a chain of islands, he expected to find patterns of speciation and distribution resembling those in an archipelago. This endeavor occupied and challenged him for the remainder of his professional career. Over the years, François conducted fieldwork all along the Andes, from Venezuela to Tierra del Fuego. His other bird-related travels took him to myriad countries on all seven continents. With enthusiasm for the cultures and peoples as well as for the birds he encountered, François found much to admire nearly everywhere he went; but South America—its landscapes, peoples, and wildlife—was doubtless closest to his heart.

After Harvard, François became a Chapman Fellow at AMNH and then, in rather quick succession, spent a year at the Marine Biology Station at Roscoff, France; held a



**François Vuilleumier.** Photograph courtesy of Rebecca Finnell and Jessica Bowen of the Dennis P. McHugh Piermont Public Library

position in the biology department at the University of Massachusetts–Boston; served as director of the Institute of Animal Ecology and Zoology at the University of Lausanne; and was a visiting professor at the University of Paris.

In 1974 François returned as an associate curator at AMNH, where he remained until his retirement in 2005. He was department chair from 1987 to 1992. His colleagues remember his charm and graciousness as well as his strong advocacy for ornithology, education, and conservation.

François produced a noteworthy bibliography of well over 150 papers on ecology, distribution, and speciation, including "Forest birds of Patagonia: Ecological geography, speciation, endemism, and faunal history" (*Ornithological Monographs* 36:255–304). He coedited *High Altitude Tropical Biogeography* (Oxford University Press, 1987). After retirement, he served as editor-in-chief of *Birds of North America*, produced in association with AMNH.

Recognized for both critical thinking and graceful writing, François served on the editorial boards of at least seven journals. He was a Fellow of the AAAS and held memberships in the American Society of Naturalists (Elective Member, 1979), Biogeographical Society (France, Elective Member, 1975), National Society for the Protection of Nature and the Environment (France), Ornithological Society of France (Corresponding Member), Society of Sigma Xi, Society for the Study of Evolution, and Society of Systematic Zoology. He was also president of the Neotropical Ornithological Society, and there is a fund for research on Neotropical birds named in his honor.

François was fluent in English, French, German, and Spanish. This served him well not only in the field, but also in teaching. He taught at the City University of New York and the College of the Atlantic and provided support for Latin American students in research and at meetings. His language skills and international experience were of enormous help as a colleague on the AOU Memorials Committee. Throughout his life, François continued to draw and paint the birds he so loved. There were always clay figures and recent sketches in his office. After retirement, he participated in several art shows in New York's Rockland County, where he had at least one one-man show.

François is survived by his wife, Rebecca Finnell, former executive editor of *Natural History* magazine; their daughter, Isabelle; and two children from a previous marriage, Alex Vuilleumier and Claire Vuilleumier Getman, all of whom were with him when he died.

*Notes:* I have referred to AOU rather than AOS because that was the name of the organization at the time. I am grateful to the archivists at the Smithsonian and to Joel Cracraft (AMNH) for their help. Rebecca Finnell lovingly edited a version of the manuscript.

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