



IN MEMORIAM: JEAN DORST, 1924–2001

Author: Vuilleumier, François

Source: *The Auk*, 121(4) : 1289-1290

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: [https://doi.org/10.1642/0004-8038\(2004\)121\[1289:IMJD\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1642/0004-8038(2004)121[1289:IMJD]2.0.CO;2)

BioOne Complete (complete.BioOne.org) is a full-text database of 200 subscribed and open-access titles in the biological, ecological, and environmental sciences published by nonprofit societies, associations, museums, institutions, and presses.

Your use of this PDF, the BioOne Complete website, and all posted and associated content indicates your acceptance of BioOne's Terms of Use, available at www.bioone.org/terms-of-use.

Usage of BioOne Complete content is strictly limited to personal, educational, and non - commercial use. Commercial inquiries or rights and permissions requests should be directed to the individual publisher as copyright holder.

BioOne sees sustainable scholarly publishing as an inherently collaborative enterprise connecting authors, nonprofit publishers, academic institutions, research libraries, and research funders in the common goal of maximizing access to critical research.

IN MEMORIAM: JEAN DORST, 1924–2001

FRANÇOIS VUILLEUMIER

*Department of Ornithology, American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street,
New York, New York 10024, USA*

Jean Dorst, former director of the National Museum of Natural History (Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle; MNHN) in Paris, a member of the French Académie des Sciences, one of the founders and second president of the Charles Darwin Foundation for the Galápagos, president of the 16th International Ornithological Congress (IOC), and vice president of the Commission of Protection of Threatened Species of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), died on 8 August 2001 in Paris, after a long illness. He had turned 77 the day before. Dorst's extraordinarily diverse and productive career has been reported in ornithological journals, in popular magazines, and in the daily press in France and other countries.

Dorst became a Corresponding Fellow of the AOU in 1960 and an Honorary Fellow in 1973. He was also an honorary member of the British Ornithologists' Union. He was president of the Société Ornithologique de France in 1966–1967. During the 1960s to 1980s, he helped organize international ornithological congresses as a member of the IOC Permanent Executive Committee and as a member of its standing Committee on Ornithological Nomenclature. In 1974, he was president of the 14th IOC in Canberra, Australia.

Jean Dorst was born near Mulhouse (Alsace, France) on 7 August 1924. As a boy, perhaps under the influence of his father, a textile industrialist who collected butterflies as a hobby, Dorst started to collect animals and plants. After studies in biology and paleontology at the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Paris (Sorbonne), Dorst began his long-term career at the MNHN on 1 January 1947, when he was hired as "assistant" in the "Laboratoire de Zoologie (Mammifères et Oiseaux)." He then became, successively, "sous-directeur" (1949), and "professeur titulaire" and chairman of Mammifères et Oiseaux (1964; he was only 40). In that last position, Dorst followed a roster of only five distinguished predecessors: Etienne, then Henri, Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire; Henri, then Alphonse, Milne-Edwards; and

Jacques Berlioz. Dorst was elected to the directorship of the MNHN in 1975 and re-elected in 1980. In 1985, he resigned from the directorship of the MNHN, before the end of his second term, to protest the French Government's radical administrative changes in the structure of the venerable establishment, which he, like all of its personnel, affectionately called "la maison." Those so-called "reforms," imposed by the government against the wishes of the museum's staff, meant "serious threats to the independence and originality" of the museum. Unfortunately, Dorst's sad predictions have come to pass.

Dorst obtained his Ph.D. in 1949, the same year he was promoted to "sous-directeur" at MNHN. His doctoral dissertation, prepared under Professors E. Bourdelle and J. Berlioz, dealt with the structural colors of hummingbird feathers. In the 1970s, he published several papers on structural colors in bird-of-paradise feathers, examined through scanning electron microscopy. An all-around naturalist, he traveled widely, and was an elected member of the exclusive Société des Explorateurs. In the mid-1980s, he and I co-authored a book chapter on convergences among taxa and avifaunas living at high altitudes in the tropical belt around the world. Although Dorst was very fond of Africa's high mountains, his long-term stomping ground was the Andes of South America. From 1954 onward, he made several long trips to Peru, where he studied especially the high Andean puna. He published seminal papers on the ecology of the puna avifauna and on the breeding biology of several of its endemic species. His 1967 book, *South America and Central America: A Natural History* (originally published in English and translated into French in 1969), reflects not only his personal experiences in the Neotropics, but also his broad erudition.

In 1958, coincident with the centennial of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) sent Dorst to the Galápagos Islands on a

reconnaissance mission—to study the possibility of establishing a research station on the islands. A group of remarkable men with far-reaching vision (including Victor van Straelen, Harold Coolidge, Jean-G. Baer, Julian Huxley, François Bourlière, Dillon Ripley, Robert Bowman, Peter Scott, and others) founded the Darwin Foundation for the Galápagos. Dorst was Secretary General of the foundation from its inception until 1964 and its president from 1964 to 1967. A fascinating brochure, *The First Seven Years of the Charles Darwin Foundation for the Galápagos Isles, 1959–1966* by Jean Dorst and Jacques Laruelle, tells the story of the very difficult beginnings of what became a permanent research station. Without Jean Dorst's energy and administrative savvy, the Galápagos biological station as we know it today would not exist, and much of the research carried out in those islands since the early 1960s might not have been possible. Evolutionary biology thus owes a huge intellectual debt to Dorst.

Dorst keenly perceived the grave threats posed to nature by an unchecked world population growth and an unbridled spurt of development made in the name of economic progress. His reflections on that carnage and on nature conservation led him to write *Avant que Nature Meure*, published in French in 1965, and subsequently translated into 17 languages. His classic text on bird migration was first published in French in 1956, and in English in 1961; his last book, *Et si l'on parlait un peu de la vie? Propos d'un naturaliste*, written when he was already quite ill, was published in 1999, two years before his death. Jean Dorst will be remembered as one of the most eloquent, concerned, and influential of the 20th-century conservationists who brought to plain folks and high-level government officials alike the realization that conserving wild nature matters for all of us.

Dorst pursued a parallel career in mammalogy; he edited the quarterly journal *Mammalia* for 40 years, from 1960 to 2000; he had been "secrétaire" since 1948. In 1970, he published his *A Field Guide to the Larger Mammals of Africa*, with illustrations by Pierre Dandelot; this was translated into French in 1972 and German in 1973.

As director of the MNHN, Dorst was instrumental in the renovation of the museum's

dilapidated Grande Galerie, a project begun in 1976 under his mandate, but completed only in 1994, and now the Grande Galerie de l'Évolution.

Dorst spent several hours writing early every morning before museum business began. As a result of that extraordinary discipline, and in addition to about 15 books, he authored or co-authored close to 600 papers and notes, perhaps about 300 of which are scientific and the rest "popular." He wrote easily, well, and fast.

For his accomplishments, Dorst received many honors—which he greatly enjoyed. C. Chappuis and C. Énard named *Cisticola dorsti* for him, but I know that his most cherished honor was election to the French Académie des Sciences in 1973. He was then only 49 years old, a mere toddler considering the advanced age of most academy members.

I enjoyed Dorst's friendship, starting in 1963 when we first became acquainted. I was a 25-year-old Ph.D. student, then; he was 39 and about to become Chair of the Mammals and Birds Section of the MNHN. Instead of my superior, Dorst acted more like a close colleague, always ready to talk and share ideas, and not afraid to ask his younger colleague to read and criticize drafts of his papers on the biogeography of South American birds, a continent I had not yet even visited. Jean was a cosmopolite; interested in politics, science, the arts; fluent in several languages, including German, English, and Spanish; at ease in all kinds of circles, among humble Andean llama shepherds as well as members of high Peruvian society, beginners in ornithological research as well as luminaries on the international ornithological scene; carpenters at the MNHN and members of the European royalty. He was one of the most brilliant naturalists of the twentieth century, a dedicated museum scholar and administrator, and a powerful force in international conservation. He belongs to an era that cannot easily be recreated. He is survived by his wife, Emmanuelle.

I thank Raymond Lévêque for much important information, and acknowledge my debt to the memorials by Antoine Reille, Catherine Vincent, Christian Jouanin, Christian Énard, and Marcel Jacquat.