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IN MEMORIAM

Luc Hoffmann, 1923–2016

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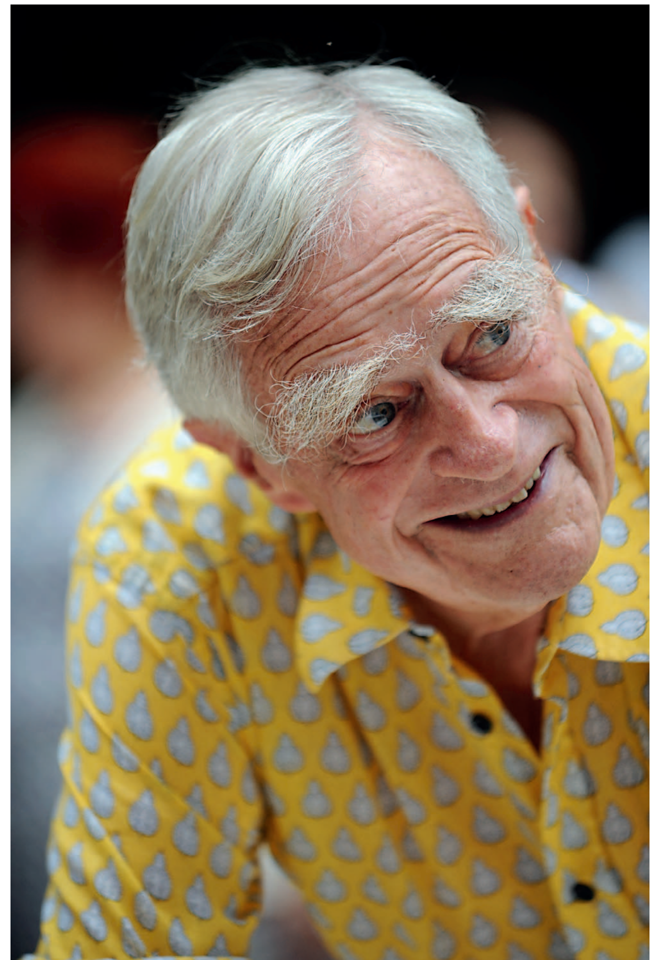
Larger than life yet modest beyond reasonableness, Luc Hoffmann's image reflected differently upon each of his many acquaintances. To some he was a fleeting, reserved, yet totally unforgettable person; to others he was a distant, nearly mythical, global conservation luminary. To the few receiving the carefully reserved gift of closer intimacy, generally cemented through a dinner invitation, he was a dependable colleague; an incisive, strategic, and inspired supporter; an understated mentor; or a trustworthy partner. To his immediate family, he was a thoughtful father and charmed grandfather. To his widely extended professional family, he was no less of a father or grandfather figure. And he was a uniquely accomplished facilitator of ornithology, an attribute generally overshadowed by his many other lifetime credits.

Luc Hoffmann passed away on July 21, 2016, at the age of 93, at his truly loved home deep in the Camargue, the great wetland of the Rhône River Delta. It was there, in 1954—among the marshes, gulls, ducks, flamingos, herons, white horses, and black bulls—that he established a research station that evolved into a full-fledged private applied-research institute, Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat, where he lived for part of the year and oversaw its evolution with patronal care. This is where he and his wife, Daria Hoffmann-Razumovsky, chose to have their children—Vera, André, Maja, and Daria—mature, drawing their values from within a Camarguaise country culture, far from the salons of his natal Basel. It was here that he worked persistently for seven decades to create unique partnerships, institutions, and processes for the protection and wise use of the surrounding wetlands. It was here that some of the great ideas of twentieth-century conservation were gestated. And it was here that several generations of ornithologists enjoyed his patronage, care, and feeding—literally so at the Station's lunch room.



Luc Hoffmann in 2008

Hans Lukas Hoffmann need not have labored as a biologist and conservationist. Born on January 23, 1923, in Basel, Switzerland, he grew up ensconced within one of the world's great family fortunes, as grandson of the founder of what is now Roche, the world's largest biotechnology firm, in which his family maintains an undivided majority interest. As a result, Luc also grew up surrounded by great minds of business and science; and he faithfully tended to his familial responsibilities, serving on the Hoffmann-La Roche board for 43 years, advising the company through bumps in its chemical pharmaceutical business and in its successful adaptation to the diagnostic and treatment potentials of modern genetics. Luc also grew up surrounded by the great artistic minds of his parents' time—his father

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was a prominent collector of early-twentieth-century art, his mother a sculptor and art collector, and his stepfather a commissioner of works from the notable composers of the century—and art and music were always among his great engagements. But after the passing of his father and brother when Luc was nine and ten, when he was thrust toward the forefront of this public world of privilege, he chose nature, biology, birds, and conservation to pursue as his life's great work; and he chose the quiet and social detachment of the Camargue wetland in which to do it.

A devoted birdwatcher from his youth, Luc published his first ornithology paper at the age of 18 on "The passage of seabirds in the vicinity of Basel." The oddity of the topic of seabirds in the center of Europe should have been a signal of things to come, presaging his interest in water birds, in migration, in the value of scientific publication, and in thinking outside the box. Switching from his patrimonial chemistry major to biology, he earned his Ph.D. from the University of Basel, studying down morphogenesis in the Common Tern. At 31 he bought his first bit of the Camargue and moved there to establish a wetland bird research station. He is credited with more than 60 authored articles and books, but authorship was not a goal unless useful for some extrinsic purpose; his great contribution and joy was working quietly in the background, facilitating the research of others and studying its impact. Out of his research station, which he actively managed for 20 years, emerged nearly 1,000 publications and, importantly to Luc, 74 (as of this writing) doctoral dissertations from 12 countries. He saw to it that staff were hired and nurtured to study the waterbirds of the Camargue and around the Mediterranean; some of these scientists had their total professional development and lives at the Station, where they became international leaders in their fields. He brought in as advisors some of the most respected scientists of the period, to whom he listened with discernment. He also took the International Waterfowl Research Bureau (IWRB) under his wing. His belief in the benefits of scientific research extended to Roche, where his advocacy of science encouraged the company to become a world leader, in 2015 spending more than $1.2 billion on research. His view, in both business and conservation, was that scientific research was the foundation of progress.

Beyond ornithology, he was cofounder of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF); the force behind the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands; a leader in the International Union for Conservatrion of Nature (IUCN), International Council for Bird Protection (now BirdLife International), and IWRB (now Wetlands International); and an instigator of natural parks in France, Spain, Greece, and Mauritania. Luc was honored by all these organizations, including the naming of WWF's Hoffmann Institute, which addresses scientific solutions to sustainability; IUCN's Luc Hoffmann Award for Ecosystem Management, which recognizes local, volunteer conservationists; and Wetlands International's Luc Hoffmann Medal for wetlands science and conservation. Luc himself established the Tour du Valat, Hoffmann, and MAVA foundations, which will carry out his legacies for years to come. Fondation MAVA, now led by André Hoffmann and other family members, has become one of the key funders of global conservation.

While his honors were many and varied, those in the field of science surely held a special place for Luc, such as his honorary doctorates; being elected an Honorary Fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union and a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science; receiving the Kai Curry-Lindahl Award of the Waterbird Society; and the naming of the Luc Hoffmann Chair of Field Ornithology at the Edward Grey Institute of the University of Oxford, the birthplace of modern ornithological population biology.

How he achieved these scientific and conservation advances may be the best life-lesson for the rest of us. He premised his work on the value of partnerships, inclusiveness, dialogue, and working together. He believed in relationships, order, rules, organization, planning, government–private partnership, and viable governance systems, both by using existing systems that could be influenced and by creating new systems to achieve particular ends. He valued the work of individuals in accomplishing great things, and the potential of individuals to grow into responsibilities they are offered. An ornithologist could have no greater friend, supporter, or patron than Dr. Hoffmann—owing less to finances than to his belief in you as a person of merit, no matter where you came from. At Roche he is credited with instilling emphases on sustainability, ethics, and social responsibility. And that, too, is what he did for ornithology and wetland conservation.

A life such as this defies quick memorialization, deserving a book-length treatment by a skilled biographer. The fact is that Dr. Luc Hoffmann was no less than a Churchillian presence in bird conservation for nearly a century, at the apex of Western civilization's increasingly fleeting moment of conservation awareness, which he was fundamental in creating. Among all the great men of conservation in his century, most of whom were his friends and colleagues, he stands alone as the one who believed that it is individual people, through their singular efforts working within supportive systems, that can make a difference. His was a life exceptionally well lived—well lived for the benefit of birds and wetlands, the Earth and its people.

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