



In Memoriam

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IN MEMORIAM: FRANCISCO BERNIS, 1916–2003

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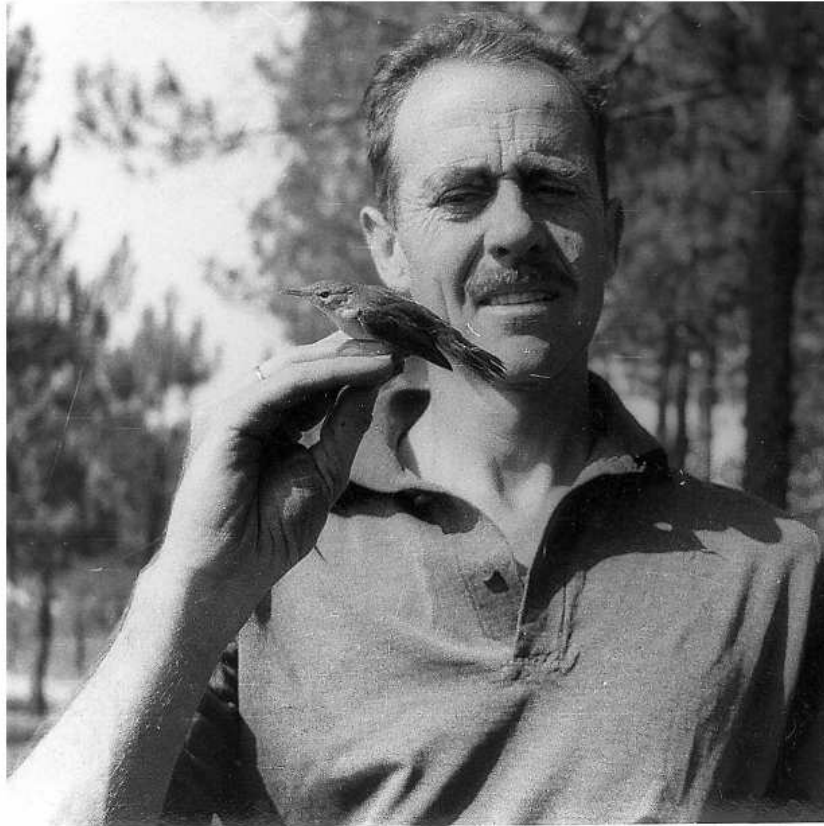
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Francisco Bernis Madrazo, the father of modern ornithology in Spain, was born in Salamanca on 16 August 1916 and died in Madrid on 10 November 2003. He published his first avifaunistic accounts as a 17-year-old. His studies of birds and natural history were dramatically interrupted by the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), but were eventually completed in 1941. His doctoral work in botany was completed in 1950, and his review of the genus *Armeria* (Plumbaginaceae) was published between 1953 and 1956. With very few exceptions, previous knowledge of the birds of Spain within the country was the result of sporadic visits by foreign ornithologists. Bernis realized that only a major effort would improve the situation, and he devoted the rest of his life to achieving it.

In 1954, along with a small group of like-minded enthusiasts, he founded the Spanish Ornithological Society (now SEO/BirdLife). SEO publishes the journal *Ardeola*. In the first issue, Bernis published "Prontuario de la avifauna española," a checklist of the birds of Spain (1954). The SEO established a library, began a banding program, and initiated winter waterfowl counts, a nest record scheme, and national censuses of some species and, from the early 1970s, ornithological atlasings and raptor migration counts. For 20 years, Bernis served as SEO's Secretary General and Editor of *Ardeola*, devoting huge amounts of personal time and effort to make up for a chronic lack of funds and paid staff. In 1956, he was appointed Professor of Vertebrate Zoology at Madrid University (Universidad Complutense), where he undertook a notable career in research and conservation.

Bernis's *Migración en Aves, Tratado Teórico y Práctico* (1966), was a modern and authoritative synthesis of avian migration. In *Aves Migradoras Ibericas* (1966–1971) and *Migración de las Aves en el Estrecho de Gibraltar, vol. 1: Planeadoras* (1980), he documented migration in Spain and provided accurate data on the raptors and storks that crossed from western Europe to Africa. He also published on the distribution and ecology of Iberian birds, and his *Información Española sobre Anátidas y Fochas* (1964) gave the first account of important sites for waterfowl. His "An ecological view of the Spanish avifauna, with reference to the nordic and alpine birds," read at the eleventh International Ornithological Congress held in Basel in 1954, sparked the interests of many young Spanish workers who entered ornithology.

Bernis was a pioneer conservationist. In the decades between the 1940s and the 1970s, Spain underwent huge social and economic changes. Major conservation problems included the reclamation of wetlands and the persecution of birds of prey. Bernis effectively persuaded the organizations in charge of game and forest management to adopt policies similar to those in more advanced countries. For example, in 1956, on behalf of the SEO, he prepared a full proposal for a list of protected bird species. He had prepared, in 1953, a detailed memorandum sent to General Franco on the need to conserve the Coto Doñana. In 1972, he was an official Spanish delegate at the Ramsar Conference on the conservation of wetlands and waterfowl. Francisco Bernis was directly involved in the establishment of the national sections of the International Council for Bird Preservation (now BirdLife International) and the World Wildlife Fund. But



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(In Cantalejo, Spain, 1963. Photograph by Juan Antonio González Morales.)

his major contribution was through the pages of *Ardeola*, which were used to disseminate ideas and information on conservation. Not surprisingly, most of the many environmentalist groups founded in Spain during the 1970s and 1980s were initiated by young SEO members.

During his career at Madrid University, until he became Emeritus in 1985, he directed 23 Ph.D. students, most of them in ornithology, many of whom are now engaged in teaching and research in Spain. Meanwhile, SEO/BirdLife has grown into an influential organization with more than 9,000 members and 50 full-time staff. Equally important is that our knowledge of birds in Spain and prospects for conservation have improved greatly. Bernis's dreams have, in large measure, been fulfilled.

Bernis was an austere, hardworking man. He enjoyed birds, dogs, and field walks. He cared for a small orchard collection in his chalet at La Granja, in the Guadarrama Mountains. He married Cristina Carro in 1945; she died on 26 June 2002. They raised three children. To the young people whose fortune it was to work at his side, he always promptly gave help and advice.

Bernis was made an Honorary Fellow of the AOU in 1982. He was also a Corresponding or Honorary member of the British Ornithologists' Union, the Deutsche Ornithologische Gesellschaft, and The French Society for Ornithology. He became Honorary President of SEO/BirdLife. His truly exemplary work will have an everlasting influence in Spanish ornithology and conservation.
