



## TRIBUTE TO ALEXIS NOUAILHAT (1966-2021)

LE V<sup>th</sup> International Shrike Symposium - Vairão - Portugal



We can only say that the bird in our V<sup>th</sup> conference logo looks happy. The sparkle in his eyes and a smile on his face show that he is happy with himself! Job well done: one prey just captured and another has already been impaled on a thorn. We can only pity the poor little creatures in the picture; one is still desperately fighting for survival, and the other seems to have already given up. The message is clear: a hooked bill passerine with a conspicuous Zorro

mask can only be a shrike; a strong focus on a distinctive reddish cap reveals that it is a Woodchat Shrike, a species that captures small animals and maintains larders. As mentioned above, the cartoonist adds a distinct humorous side to reality. Pedagogy and humor go together very well.

This drawing is simply a feast for the eyes thanks to the talent of a unique artist: Alexis Nouailhat. His global work has rightly been called “*remède contre la morosité*,” a remedy for gloom! His brushstrokes are so skillful, and typical that everyone recognizes him immediately.

I had never met Alexis but knew his famous postcards well. When Luis Reino, the principal organizer of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Shrike Symposium planned in Portugal, suggested that we have a “*funny and appealing logo*,” Alexis’s name immediately came to mind. An email sent to him in late October 2019 received a reply with this very happy-looking Woodchat less than a week later. It was, of course, unanimously accepted as our future logo.

Alexis had only one wish: he wanted us to make his work better known. As a tribute, we present some of his postcards.

Alexis traveled extensively throughout France, Europe, and the world. From the thousands of watercolors that were created in the field, around 100 (!) richly illus-



trated travel diaries (“carnets de voyage”) were written. He had a fondness for wild mountain regions, as shown in his series of *Aquarelles* depicting the massifs of the Alpine system between the Mediterranean Sea and Slovenia. His first *carnet de voyage* on this system was *Le Massif des Ecrins*. He lived in a small village, at the foot of this Massif, a national park, a vast adventure playground! Amid vibrant wildlife, Alexis could observe the Bearded Vulture, one of his most-loved summit birds. It benefits from a fantastic watercolor publication: *Sur les ailes du Gypaète*.

Alexis’s boundless love for nature and talent also enabled him to create almost 500 popular postcards, mainly dedicated to birds, mammals, and nature in general. He often put his paintbrush at the service of associative strug-

gles and managed to convey his messages thanks to his humorous *Aquarelles*. For example, animals often considered undesirable, such as wolves, foxes, stoats, and birds of prey, become lovable animals in his work!

Alexis worked for numerous publishers and exhibited his watercolors in several salons in France and abroad. He left us far too early in May 2021, a great loss for those concerned with nature protection.

His website is still active: [alexis-nouailhat.com](http://alexis-nouailhat.com), and his work is exhibited throughout the year in his former workshop, *l’Atelier du Gypaète* in Saint-Bonnet en Champsaur, in the Hautes-Alpes (south-eastern France).

Norbert Lefranc

