



This issue is respectfully dedicated to the memory of
Prof. JÁNOS BALOGH (1913–2002)

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Dr. JÁNOS BALOGH – zoologist, ecologist, and one of the emerald acarologists of the last century – died at the age of 90 on the 15th of August in 2002. He had an incredible career: an orphan who became a world-famous scientist, an unemployed assistant professor who became a ‘professor emeritus’, a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS), a world-famous soil biologist who led more than 30 expedition to tropical regions of the world. He immensely influenced the whole of Hungarian scientific life – especially promoting the improvement of biology – as a professor and head of the Department of Zootaxonomy and Ecology of the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, and as a member and executive of the HAS. Besides his scientific work he was a successful teacher, who created a school with his popular scientific lectures by transmitting scientific results in a way easy to understand.

JÁNOS BALOGH was born in Nagybecskó (now: Velki Bocskov) in Máramaros county. After leaving Pázmány Péter University he started his career as an unpaid assistant professor in the Department of Systematic Zoology and Zoogeography in 1935. In the very same year he earned his university doctoral degree and habilitated in 1943. After World War II he returned to the department as a researcher, in 1951. Soon he became head of the newly-organised Soil Zoology Research Group of the HAS (1963). In 1952 he obtained the Ph.D. and then the D.Sc. in biology two years later. In 1964 he became a corresponding member of HAS and was elected to the position of ordinary member in 1973.

He was head of the Department of Systematic Zoology and Ecology from 1966 until his retirement (1984). He was a successful professor who established ecology as a subject in the Hungarian Higher Education system. With a subject entitled ‘Introduction to Biology’ he focused attention on the most important ecological problems of the Earth.

Before his appointment to a professorship (1963) he managed to travel to the tropics (Africa) with the help and support of UNESCO. That trip was followed by more than 30 expeditions to locations in South America, New Guinea, Australia and New Caledonia. He collected specimens from all of these places; most were soil animals, but he also tried to collect other materials to help the Hungarian Natural History Museum. He returned from his last expedition in 2000.

Prof. BALOGH’s scientific work can be grouped in three categories:

1. He ‘fell in love’ with spiders during his years in secondary school. By the time he entered the university he was already an accomplished arachnologist. He gave his first lectures on that subject while still a student.

2. With the advice and direction of Dr. ENDRE DUDICH, who was head of the Zoology Department at that time, he started to study the soil animals that influence the decomposition of organic material. Their basic work on taxonomy, faunistics, coenology and ecology resulted in several publications that earned them international honour. JÁNOS BALOGH wrote a remarkable synthesis based on their research. As a result of his theoretical work two books were published: “A zoocönológia alapjai” [The basics of zoocoenology] (1953) and “Lebensgemeinschaften der Landtiere” [Community

ecology of soil animals] (1958). The first of these, which presents the main ideas and methods of these branches of science, was recognised as a guiding and fundamental manual in Hungary, while the second was seen in this light throughout Europe. Such was the leading intellectual context of his life, which explains why he could understand the dangers threatening the biosphere, and therefore the existence of mankind. While maintaining his focussed scientific research on taxonomy and ecology, he dedicated his life – seizing every opportunity – to drawing the attention of politicians and decision-makers, and also every-day people, to these dangers. His lectures, broadcast by radio and television, reminded his listeners of their responsibilities and duties, and were truly successful and influential.

3. The third and most important field of his work was acarology. He started this work quite early when, while observing spiders, he realised that there were far more things to discover in that important group of soil animals, the mites. In fact he worked in acarology continuously since 1937, and there were few years in which he failed to publish at least one work on mites. He was mainly interested in oribatid, mesostigmatid and uropodid mites, but had interest in other groups as well.

He dealt with faunistics, taxonomy, and the fauna of tropical regions, but he was mainly interested in general connections and he tried to envision and describe whole systems. His articles and books containing identification keys are still fundamental and widely used works. His world famous book “The oribatid genera of the world” (1972) was the essential reference for the previous generation of researchers and students, like a subsequent work with his son (1992) has been for the current generation. He also wrote several other books with his son, who was both a student and a colleague. Unfortunately he did not live to see the publication of his last large work (Identification key to the Extra-Holarctic oribatids).

Based on the material collected during his expeditions many novelties were discovered and published throughout the world. He discovered and described hundreds of new taxa. In his honour several dozen species or genera bear his name, and not only of mites.

He was also very active in the politics of science. He was vice president of the Biological Section of HAS between 1970–1973, and president between 1973–1980. He was fortunate to have been acknowledged for his accomplishments during all periods of his life. In 1963 he was awarded the Kossuth Prize, followed in 1993 by both the Széchenyi Prize and a Pro Natura commemorative medal. In 1995 he was rewarded with the highest honour of the HAS, the Gold Medal of HAS. Recently he received the Hungarian Inheritance Prize and in 2001 he became owner of the Corvin Chain. He was also elected to membership in the Austrian Academy of Science.

JÁNOS BALOGH was a true Hungarian, who always insisted on promoting the prosperity of his nation. He certainly had a long and complete life and was lucky to have been able to realise his dreams, to achieve everything that a man who lived for his job could achieve. He was happy, because he could work with a subject that he enjoyed. In his person we could respect an open-minded scientist, captivating lecturer and a professor fighting for our future, for the conservation and protection of nature and the environment. Now, after his death, we can preserve his memory in our minds.