

In memoriam Dr. János Balogh

Hungarian science, university education and the whole environmentally conscious society has suffered a great loss. On 15th August 2002, at the age of 89, h.c. prof. emer. dr. János Balogh, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, honorary member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, leading professor of the Department of Systematic Zoology and Ecology at the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, an internationally renowned scientist, a distinguished specialist of Arachnida and Oribatida, an outstanding expert of soil zoology, community ecology of animals and terrestrial ecology and also working in the tropics and on global environmental protection, died in Budapest after a short illness.

János Balogh was born on 19th February, 1913 in Nagybocskó, north-east Hungary (belonging today to Ukraine). His father was a schoolmaster and cantor, but he died in action during the First World War. His wife soon followed him and János Balogh was raised by his caring grandparents before he was taken into a protestant orphanage. His extraordinary mental abilities, intelligence and dutifulness was already recognised at the age of 10 and he was accepted by the Lutheran secondary school in Budapest, which was famous for its extremely high standard in education. He always remembered his old school as a determining factor of his career and mentality. He studied biology at the Pázmány Péter University, Budapest and defended his PhD in 1935. In 1944, at the age of 31, he qualified as a private lecturer of the university under the directorate of Professor Endre Dudich, Head of the Department of Systematic Zoology and Zoogeography, who had raised generations of Hungarian zoologists for more than three decades. János Balogh had already become an assistant lecturer of the department in 1937 and throughout his career as a teacher, professor and researcher most of his activities were centred there. Within the department, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences founded a Soil Zoology Research Team in 1960, which he led until 1980.

Following the retirement of Professor Dudich, János Balogh in turn became the head of the Department of Systematic Zoology and Ecology of the Eötvös Loránd University (1966-1984), from where he retired as an Emeritus University Professor. In 1985 he was conferred with an Honorary Doctorate of the university.

In 1965, he was elected a corresponding member, in 1973 an ordinary member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In 1986, he became an honorary member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. He chaired the Section of Biological Sciences in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for two periods.

His scientific activities had three main directions: the taxonomy and historical chorology of spiders (Arachnida) and oribatid mites (Oribatida), the community ecology of terrestrial animals, and finally, global ecological problems and environmental protection. His first faunistic and community ecological work on spiders (1935) and his „Oribatei of Hungary” (1943) already showed his excellent taxonomical knowledge. His interest in ecology and community ecology led him to critically evaluate and synthesize the current international literature and to write his fundamental book on the community ecology of animals: „A zoocönológia alapjai” (Budapest, 1953, pp. 248), which was the first textbook in this topic in Hungary including an extended German summary. In 1958, he wrote an outstanding book in German, „Lebensgemeinschaften der Landtiere, ihre Erforschung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der zoocönologischen Arbeitsmethoden” (Budapest-Berlin, 1958, pp. 560); which was highly recognised even outside German-speaking countries.

The taxonomical, faunistical, ecological and community ecological research of the Soil Zoology Research Team of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, which was led by János Balogh, was internationally renowned. They were one of the first research groups dealing with the zoological components of organic matter decomposition in forest soils in Europe. The multidisciplinary approach of global ecological problems and other basic environmental questions (e. g. the relationship between the oxygen concentration of the air and abiotic and biotic evolution), János Balogh mainly built into his university lectures and into innumerable radio and television programmes, which he made in order to increase public awareness of the environment. He was a charismatic lecturer, presenting his thoughts clearly and in a fine voice.

An outstanding part of his scientific career was the result of more than thirty soil zoological expeditions he led from at the age of fifty (!) in 1963 up to 1995 to Africa, Asia, South-America, Australia, New Guinea, the South Sea Islands and New Caledonia with the support of UNESCO and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and a lot of local help. From joint work with many co-authors, several hundred articles have been published on the scientific results of the soil zoological collection of his expeditions, some of them in our present journal, *Opuscula Zoologica*. Excellent television documentary series shown for decades in Hungary were also shot during the expeditions, which introduced many exotic parts of the world with the accurate and interesting text written by J. Balogh full of concern, care, and a sense of responsibility for the protection of natural values and the future of mankind.

His scientific publications bridged over nearly seven decades, finishing with the book: „Identification keys to the Oribatid mites of the extra-Holarctic Regions, I-II” (Well-Press, Budapest, 2002, pp. 450 + 504). This last *magnum opus* of his, written with his son, Péter Balogh, came out several months after his death making the total number of his publications: 10 books and over 200 scientific publications.

Professor Balogh was a helpful and understanding person, loving his family as well as his country. He did not like calling his colleagues to account, but expected everyone to work at the highest possible level and to be fair in every situation and towards everyone. He carried out his science-political duties with responsibility and with an appropriate approach to compromises, but only along obvious principles.

János Balogh was presented with many awards and prizes. He especially appreciated the Kossuth Prize, which is given to the most distinguished scientists in Hungary, the recognitions (e.g. h.c. prof. emer.) of his university, the Gold Medal of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Hungarian Spiritual Heritage Prize and the Corvin Chain given by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary; which only a maximum of twelve internationally recognised scientists can hold at the same time. All who know his scientific excellence and deep humanity will always remember him with true respect.

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