

JÁNOS BALOGH'S PATH OF LIFE

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Dr. JÁNOS BALOGH was born 19 February 1913, at Nagybecskó (Máramaros County). His father was a form teacher who, however, could not keep track of his son growing into a big boy because he had been drafted into the army and was reported missing in the battle of Pržemysl, 1914. He must have been buried in a mass grave. It was this time that he and his mother moved to Túrkeve, to his grandparents', the cantors of the Reformist Church. At the age of six he was hard hit again, he lost his mother, as well, who – with several other members of the family – was carried off by the Spanish influenza epidemic. Since he proved his intellectual skills at a fairly early age, his grandparents grasped this opportunity, and he, as a war orphan, could carry on with his studies. That is how he got into the National Protestant Orphanage in September 1923. As he was an excellent pupil, he could continue his studies at a secondary grammar school, and eventually passed his Final Exam at the Lutheran Grammar School (Fasori). He would often express his appreciation for the years spent there, the splendid atmosphere of education that stimulated interests in both natural sciences and humanities, thereby not losing sight of the importance of sports, either. That is where he started showing interest in biology, and spiders, in particular. As early as at the age of 18 he compiled a twenty-page study in Latin, "The World's Dichtine Spiders", and decided to travel to the tropics.

He continued his studies at Péter Pázmány University as a Horthy boarder. Having acquired his degree he attained a Ph.D. in 1935. In the beginning Professor ENDRE DUDICH, the Head of the Department of Zootaxonomy and Zoogeography, invited him to work with him as an unpaid research student. The journalist's job offered to him at the *Tolnai Világlap* and the boarding school teacher's position at the Horthy College ensured his livelihood. Later on he became appointed as a professor's assistant, then assistant professor, and in 1944 he qualified as a private university lecturer. After this he worked for the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and then returned to the Department as a scientific researcher in 1951. In 1952 he became a candidate in biological sciences, and two years later, in 1954, he became the Doctor of Biological Sciences. He worked as the leader of the newly established Soil Zoological Research Group between 1960 and 1980. The members of this group and the staff of the Department pursued their research work even back then, and for long-long years up to the present day, in close cooperation. Under his guidance the taxonomic research of significant soil zoological animal groups was conducted, whereby he was the specialist of spiders and oribatid mites. In Europe they were the first ones to deal with the zoogenic factors of the decomposition of woodland soils' organic-content. Thanks to the results of their taxonomic, fau-

nistic, cenologic, and ecological analyses they won international acclaim. His theoretical work was highly remarkable, as a synthesis of his research work he published two books: “*The basis of zoocenology*”, Budapest, 1953, and “*Lebensgemeinschaften der Landtiere*”, Budapest–Berlin, 1958. Both were fundamental manuals, the former one in Hungarian, the latter in European respects, by which he laid a solid foundation to lean back on in terms of the right orientation for the research of zoocenology and biocenoses. These volumes clarified and gave a clear explanation of important notions, and – at the same time – introduced the reader into the research methodology of this discipline. It is not by accident that the latter volume often serves as a source of reference even today.

As an acknowledgement of his research work he became an associate member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences as early as 1965, a university professor in 1966, and in 1973 he got elected the ordinary member of HAS. He filled the vice President’s position at the Academy’s Biological Section in 1970–1973, and then worked as the President of the same organisation from 1973 to 1980. ELTE conferred an honorary degree on him in 1985, and in 1986 he was elected an honorary member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

Following Dr. ENDRE DUDICH’s retirement he became the Head of the Department of Animal Taxonomy and Ecology, and remained in charge for 18 years, up to 1984, the year of his retirement. His educational work focused on providing the basics of ecology primarily to students with biology and biology teacher’s specifications but course I students of geosciences were also keen on visiting his classes. Within the scope of a subject called “*The basis of biology*”, he endeavoured to draw these students’ attention to the major ecological problems of the Earth. He pointed out the necessity of creating a synthesis of the results of scientific research. By reading a lot, and with a fantastic gift for perception, he was the first in Hungary to call people’s attention to interrelations and problems that are relevant to how our planet functioned in the past and how it is functioning today. He was the first one to familiarise students with e.g. the abiotic and biotic evolution-dependent interrelations of the oxygen-filled atmosphere, and by applying a modern approach with the ecological impact and zoological demonstrability of continental drifts, etc. He could deliver his lectures in an excellent style; he would interweave his personal experiences into his speech and held his audience spellbound. He was always ready to talk not only to his own but the Department’s other thesis-writing students, candidates for doctor’s degree, and aspirants to candidate’s degree. Back then I – as one of the thesis-writers, and his would-be aspirant – was also keen on listening to his accounts on his tropical research expeditions and future plans. He was extremely good at filling his young students with enthusiasm, a student-

colleague of ours, for example, learnt French simply because he found professor BALOGH's lectures so inspiring that he also wanted to join a tropical expedition.

The 50-year-old Professor's dream came true for the first time in 1963 when, as a member of the Hungarian UNESCO Committee, he got the opportunity of leading a UNESCO-funded soil zoological expedition to Africa. After this year, thanks to similar funds and his extensive international connections, he organised a number of other tropical soil zoological expeditions to Africa, South America, Asia, New Guinea, Australia, Oceania, and New Caledonia in the period of 1963–1995. As a synthesis of the results of his research work, four books came out, partly written with co-authors, on the world's mite genera and species. The fifth one saw light only after his death, in 2002. Hundreds of publications the world over serve as a proof of how extensively the materials collected in the course of these expeditions were processed. Alongside with his specific, discipline-related activity, by taking advantage of the electronic media, he grasped every opportunity of calling people's attention to problems jeopardising our planet, the requirement of considering ecological laws, the protection of woods, waters, and air. Not despising, but on the contrary, recognising the quintessential importance of disseminating popular scientific knowledge he would always welcome invitations to schools or for popularising lectures. He was a very popular and acknowledged person. Everyone was very pleased to watch or listen to the series of his interesting lectures. He used his lectures as a weapon in his struggle for the future of humanity, for our "wounded planet".

As a recognition of his life's work he was awarded with Kossuth Prize (1963), Széchenyi Prize and Pro Natura Medal (both 1993), the Gold Medal of the Academy (1995), Hungarian Heritage Award (1999), The Middle Cross of the Hungarian Republic with the Star (2000), and as a cherry on the cake, he received the Corvin Chain in 2001.

In his person we respected a great and open-minded scholar, a captivating lecturer, a professor who was always ready to fight for the protection and the conservation of our environment and the nature, who always nurtured excellent connections with students. He kept on pursuing his research work and science political activity with undiminished energy even after his retirement. Almost no day passed without his visiting the Department and praising the new building of the Faculty of the Eötvös Loránd University. He enjoyed the beauty and comfort of this building. Since he remained active in the area of Ph.D. training, he could maintain his contacts with the university students of our day down to the date of his abrupt death, 15 August 2002. Despite the fact that the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Eötvös Loránd University lost a beacon of our time and an excellent researcher-lecturer in his person, his memory will never fade.