

## JÁNOS BALOGH THE ZOOLOGIST

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When commemorating someone, it is not easy to present a career of great ambitions in fragments. This is especially relevant to JÁNOS BALOGH, and since I spent a long time in his company, I know that his career has a solid consistency; it – in unison with his life – is a complete entity. Maybe the primary reason of this is that he always subordinated his private life to professional, or his professional, interests. Although we have so far listened to presentations on his biography and university-related activity, not even my fellow-speakers could help speaking about all that without elaborating on his scientific work, either, so please excuse me for possible overlaps. Here and now I am supposed to speak about him as the embodiment of my sphere of interests, namely JÁNOS BALOGH, the zoologist, the collector, the spider taxonomist, and the acarologist.

I, as someone working with him for a long time, profess and, what is more, know that he – although active in so many different fields, and made achievements in various disciplines through which the world learnt his name – remained a zoologist, let me venture the remark, a taxonomist in the deep of his heart. As a proof, it is enough to refer to an ingenious feature of his, so uncommon in other people, namely to his being aware of the most timely problem of our discipline, what to research and when, and when is it time to change subject? He always obeyed his inspirations. It was also well known that for a long time he was one of the leading figures of Hungarian biology with the task of impacting and controlling the events for a long time. Although it tied up a lot of his time, the basis he kept returning to was taxonomy, the research of arachnoids.

JÁNOS BALOGH was likely to have brought with him the affection to spiders and the passion for collecting. This is also confirmed by his first lectures but he would talk to me, his pupil as a start-up researcher, a lot about this, too. He must have been very resolute even as a young man, e.g. he decided to identify every spider genus of the world, and did that out in the field on the top of all that. He firmly believed that to this end he would need to learn SIMON's (the great spider specialist of the late 19th century) two-volume monograph inside out. I can confirm that when he was doing his collecting work in South America, and spiders would keep falling during steak beating, he would never get tired of calling out their names one after the other. Which means, that he did learn their names and knew them. SIMON's volumes, alongside with the photos and descriptions, are full of his pencilled comments. While learning the taxa, he would keep highlighting the features that he regarded to be the most important ones, and which he wanted to remember.

Just imagine, he had to learn approximately 1200 genera and fix their images in his mind!

OTTÓ HERMAN was his spider expert's model and, let me add, he was likely to see much more in him than just that. He was equally interested in OTTÓ HERMAN, the person of encyclopaedic learning, and it is for certain that this also had its impact on his life and work.

Maybe his early self-education was one of the factors that enabled him to break into the forefront of his discipline so soon. His doctoral dissertation, which also came out in the form of a small volume and acquired an international acclaim for him early on, was written about the spider fauna of Sas hill as early as 1935 and is still considered to be one of the most valuable studies of Hungarian arachnology. With that, however, JÁNOS BALOGH, the arachnologist, bid farewell to his favourites, only to return to them 35 years later, when he rendered assistance to his son. Having said that, collecting spiders on the occasion of his expeditions to the tropics remained his favourite pastime.

The reason for his separation from this area may have been that it was about this time when his professor, ENDRE DUDICH, called the young researcher's attention to the opportunities involved in the research of soil mezofauna. And JÁNOS BALOGH was clever enough to realise that these animal species, especially the mites, were absolutely un-explored in Hungary so their research was promising a lot of novelty. He got down to work without any hesitation and issued a surprisingly great number of articles on the mites of the Hungarian fauna in the period of 1937–1939. As it is so typical of every beginner, he started dealing with many different classes; he issued publications on tollatka, korongatka and oribatids. In this period of his life he probably wanted to be the follower of BERLESE, the “uncrowned king” of mite specialists in the early 20th century. He was quick to realise, however, that he would get much further by selecting and researching just one class. This class became the order of oribatids, to which he remained faithful until the end of his life.

The oribatids reciprocated the care because he could find a lot of interesting, new varieties in the fauna of the Carpathian Basin. He discovered the Mediterranean fauna of Herkulesfürdő, some interesting alpine specimens of the Kőszeg mountain range, and the highlands fauna of the Southern Carpathians. He was so successful in this respect that he chose this area as a subject of his habilitation in 1943. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences issued his dissertation, the internationally known and acclaimed *Conspectus* that brought him a great success, as well.

The war served no good either to him as an acarologist or the discipline of acarology. The uncertainty and the involuntary changes of job implied a great disadvantage. However, he was lucky again and after returning to the university de-

partment he was invited to a team organised for the investigation of haemorrhagic nephroso-nephritis, this epidemic spread by ticks (mites) in military camps, and kept working in this area for 3–4 years to come. Following that, as the Head of the Academic Soil Zoological Research Group organised by ENDRE DUDICH, he could eventually devote himself to his narrower specialisation.

And this was the moment when both his life and scientific career started evolving as an unbroken line, which stayed like that all his lifetime. Primarily he concerned himself with two issues, the research opportunity involved in the vast and yet unexplored biodiversity of the soils of tropical rain forests was one, and the compilation of an identification handbook, so necessary for the further development of oribatidology, to give an overview of the entire world or at least its parts was the other. Following the publication of several articles, that could be regarded as pre-studies and created a stir, he put together the work of his life, the identification handbook entitled *Oribatid Genera of the World* that came out in 1972.



Top, left: On the way to South America (1966), from left to right: S. MAHUNKA, J. BALOGH and I. LOKSA; Top, right: On the way to Guayaramerin, Bolivia (1967), right J. BALOGH; Down, left: On a motorboat on Rio Alto Beni (1967), left NÁNDOR IRMAY, center J. BALOGH; Down right: Santiago de Chile, the participants of the Hungarian Soil Zoological Expedition in 1966, left S. MAHUNKA, center J. BALOGH, second from right A. ZICSI. (Photos by S. MAHUNKA)

A new generation of oribatidologists has learnt the basics from this book, and it is still considered to be a standard work. After this success the idea of writing additional handbooks of this kind – above all on the level of species – engaged his attention but he had to admit that in lack of sufficient body of knowledge the time was not ripe enough for it. For this reason he turned to the big system again and, in a joint effort with his son, he wrote the enlarged and revised edition of the famous book, which was published in 1992. In the meantime, naturally, he – by himself, with me, and his son – published several more or less extensive articles by drawing on his collecting work in South America, Australia, and New Guinea. In the course of these expeditions he discovered and described dozens of new taxa.

His almost unbelievable vigour and desire to act is proven by the fact that in the very last years of his life he embarked upon another great enterprise, the compi-



Collecting in a South American rain forest (1966). Top, left: S. MAHUNKA (left), J. BALOGH (right); Top, right: J. BALOGH (left), A. ZICSI (right); Down, left: J. BALOGH (right); Down, right: J. BALOGH (left), A. ZICSI (right). (Photos S. MAHUNKA)

lation of an identification handbook on tropical species. It is so sad that he did not live to finish it, and the book that came out after his death was somewhat torso-like. Anyway, I am sure that even in this form the book will be of great help to colleagues working in tropical countries.

And now, towards the end of my presentation, I would like to make mention of something that in fact enframed JÁNOS BALOGH's career, something that also distinguished him amongst the researchers of his age: the unbelievably powerful longing for the tropics and expeditionary discoveries. And what is more, he just adored collecting. This triple characteristic of his guided him when in the late 50s, first of all owing to tropical research assignments, he started developing his international relations. First he, in his capacity of an outstanding oribatidologist, was requested to process various materials. That is how he established contacts with the Portuguese A. DE BARROS-MACHADO, and later PAULIAN and BASILEWSKY, the French Professors, all of whom provided him with a great amount of materials from Angola, East Africa, and Madagascar. This, once and for all, made him come aware of the fantastic opportunities the tropics had to offer.

True, he was not at odds with luck, either, but a frequently aired, basic life-principle of his also proved to be true: if someone really wants to achieve something, and is ready to make a sacrifice for it, he will certainly make it! Exactly that is what happened with him. Through the mediation of his colleague, ANDRÁS ZICSI, he met the Viennese Professor FRANZ who helped him launch the tropical expeditions. It was Professor FRANZ, actually, by whose proposal the UNESCO committed remarkable funds to this end, which was later complemented by the Academy, as well.

As a result, even in the hardest political times, he could set out on his first expedition to Africa in 1963, which was followed by another two real, several months long expeditions before 1970. These were expeditions in the real sense of the word, characterised by tents pitched up in jungles, thousands and thousands of kilometres covered in scarcely inhabited regions, and similar difficulties. After 1970 these expeditions became more frequent but at least once a month he left for one or two months. All in all, he made 33 smaller or bigger trips all over Africa, Australia, South America, and New Caledonia by skilfully "rounding up" funds both in Hungary and abroad.

As I have already pointed out, JÁNOS BALOGH was passionately in love with collecting, and collecting as many specimens as possible, for that matter. He was not just obsessed with his own area – as we know, the collection of soil animals never ties up one's entire work-time – he could devote some time to other classes, as well. It is true, however, that spiders involved his primary interest, and beating was his favourite method, which was also excellent for collecting insects, bugs,

aphids, and other Articulata, actually. He did all this despite the fact that he was not a museologist type of man; he was always thrilled by the outcome of research and the joy of discovery. Although his own collection of acari has its gaps, luckily, the museum bought it in his lifetime. Unfortunately a part of his spider collection found its way abroad, and it will be rather hard to get it back. We can be grateful to him for an enormous amount of materials, anyhow.

We can safely suggest that JÁNOS BALOGH, in his capacity of a zoologist acarologist, i.e. taxonomist, achieved being regarded as one of those world-famous epoch-making scholars who did the most for the cause of their discipline in the last century. Since it is unusual to get the Nobel Prize in our discipline, no one can achieve any more than that, actually.

It is well-known practice, however, that major achievements in taxonomy are recognised by naming new taxa after their discoverers. This applies to the achievements of research and collecting work alike. JÁNOS BALOGH was lucky enough to call himself immortal even during his lifetime because several dozens of taxa will bear his name until there is life on the Earth.