

JÁNOS BALOGH AND THE PROTECTION OF ENVIRONMENT

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I remember JÁNOS BALOGH, the man who was carefully putting the building blocks of his career on one another up to the very last moment of his life, always making plans for the future, the man who remained “for ever young”, who fought for the cause of environment pugnaciously, the man to whom humour was not alien, either. Let me thank the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for making it possible for me to express a few thoughts of commemoration on behalf of the Environment and Conservation Biology Committee.

JÁNOS BALOGH was awarded with the highest environmental recognition, the *Pro Natura Prize* twice, in 1983 and 1993. Just a few, very few can pride themselves with that. With making a reference to this fact I just wanted to give you a feel of the high esteem that surrounded the knowledgeable professor’s environmental activity of global dimensions before the 90s and after.

In addition to his interests and research expeditions encompassing nearly every continent and the entire biosphere, JÁNOS BALOGH nurtured very intimate emotional and professional ties with our *national parks*. Being spell-bound by the puszta of Bugac, he sought relaxation there, enjoyed its calm, grace, the atmosphere of its feathergrass-covered sand-hills, the company of herdsman and horse-herders, farming peasants and young researchers. When given a chance he would always take pride in being the spokesman of our parks, reservations, our natural Hungarian values, our “*hungarica*” as the catch-phrase of our time goes. With a firm belief in his mission, he kept professing that he was talking about Hungary’s hitherto not fully explored, hidden and precious treasures. Values the well-deserved protection of which is not yet embraced but must be, sooner rather than later... By elucidating interrelations and throwing light on the envied unique values of the Hungarian earth – thereby making them easily comprehensible to his audience – he kept talking about treasures this small country could enrich the European treasury with. This is something we need to care about more than ever before.

He considered our national parks to be the *cradle of scientific research*, and he was always ready – shoulder-to-shoulder with his fellow-scholars – to have his voice heard in protection of the institutions of environmental protection.

The voice that sounded so familiar to the ears of hundreds of thousands, and later millions, first through “*Oxygen*”, this magazine programme on the air, and then through the channels of the Hungarian Television and Duna TV. Thanks to his sharing his thoughts with me I know that JÁNOS BALOGH was one of the few who firmly believed in making sure that politicians, decision-makers, students, or even simple parents, i.e. everyone with some degree of responsibility for our future fate, should comprehend the significance, phenomena, and laws of the nature, and the

weight of any environmental mission. JÁNOS BALOGH was well aware of the fact that the sophisticated terminology used by zoologists, ecologists or academicians in itself did not really serve the objective of such a mission. JÁNOS BALOGH could understand people and talk “*in their language*”. Clearly, distinctly, with enviable dynamism, passionate enthusiasm, and convincing authenticity. Professionally and in an easy-to-understand way. And by no means did this latter make his words become unscientific. On the contrary! We are in a bad need of a great number of JÁNOS BALOGH-type series...

And maybe a last thought that couldn't be left unmentioned when we remember him:

Even in the very last moments of his life he kept campaigning for the establishment of an environmental background institution. Certainly, not in lieu of the existing magnificent scientific research centres but alongside with them. I could feel honoured to accompany him on many occasions of enjoyable conversations and fantastic academic polemics addressing this issue. I wonder whether the Professor is watching us “from the other side” now, trying to figure out what we are going to do with this initiative of his.

And from there he is looking down at us as we are trying to make good use of the nature and its irreplaceable values. He keeps watching our well thought-over, wise, and wrong steps, in one word he just cannot stop caring about the fate of his beloved discipline. I think, an ever-increasing number of people are starting to “taste” and analyse his witty ideas, the messages and admonishments of his teachings only now that he is not with us. JÁNOS BALOGH, the academician, lived a full life. The cause of environment also ranks him amongst its immortals.