

IN MEMORIAM SÁNDOR MAHUNKA
(1937–2012)



Professor Sándor Mahunka, ordinary member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Honorary Director of the Hungarian Natural History Museum, passed away unexpectedly in the early hours of Christmas Eve 2012. His death is a great loss to the Hungarian and as well the international soil zoologist community. Remembering his scientific achievements the authors of this volume dedicate their papers to his memory.

His activity in soil zoology, especially in the taxonomic study of soil mites was outstanding. Together with his beloved wife (Luise Mahunka-Papp), he devoted his life to the taxonomy of Oribatida resulting in the description of almost 3000 mite species. It is an enormous number taking into account that some 8000 species are named so far all over the world.

Almost all his career was spent at the Hungarian Natural History Museum where, between 1986 and 2004 he held the position of deputy-director general. Nevertheless, Sándor regarded one of the greatest successes of his science policy activities as taking over the leadership of the Soil Zoology Research Group of Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1998 reorganising it and affiliating it to the Hungarian Natural History Museum as The Systematic Zoology Research Group. The group provided a familiar working environment and really, Sándor and his wife had taken care of the young colleagues with the largest thoughtfulness. These ideal conditions resulted in the discovery and description of more than 600 new species to science from such under studied soil animals as Zerconida mites, Uropodina mites, earthworms, potworms and of course box-mites. Also during this period a series of monographs called *Pedozoologica Hungarica* was launched of which six volumes have been published by the members of the group so far (CSUZDI & ZICSI 2003, MAHUNKA & MAHUNKA-PAPP 2004, ANDRÁSSY 2005, 2007, 2009, CSUZDI 2010). A full list of Sándor Mahunka's scientific activity is available in MATSKÁSI (2013).

Sándor was not only an alpha taxonomist. He was also interested in the general processes of the nature, like biogeography or the genesis of the different faunas from Central Europe to South America. He was among the first scientists who recognized the importance of the different Balkanic refugia in the genesis of the Carpathian Basin's fauna and developed the well-known "Illyric-Dacian pincer theory". He was an enthusiastic naturalist, always loved travelling and collecting or simply being in the field. During his career, he visited more than 20 countries from North Korea to Australia, Madagascar, and Paraguay, and described mites from more than 80 countries.

Sándor was a devoted environmental activist; in the late seventies he organized the systematic exploration of the Hortobágy National Park resulting in the publication of the two volume monograph "The Fauna of the Hortobágy National Park I-II". This monumental work was later followed by 12 other volumes edited by him and covering different national parks of Hungary.

Sándor Mahunka must have inherited this love of NATURE from his Chippewa grandmother. His whole life he followed the lead of the ancient American Indian proverb "Treat the Earth well: it was not given to you by your parents, it was loaned to you by your children. We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors; we borrow it from our Children." By now, his soul is surely wandering on the Eternal Hunting-grounds. Here he will be kept in the memory of his numerous students, colleagues, and friends both in Hungary and abroad.

Csaba Csuzdi

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