In memoriam Karel Majer
Born 12 May 1949, died 8 August 2000

Karel Majer died suddenly one sunny summer day in the year 2000, as a result of a lasting injury he suffered two years ago in the Andaman Islands. I might venture to say that, in him, we have lost one of the leading and most interesting personalities in systematic entomology, a man of incredible diligence and talent.

Karel Majer was born on 12 May 1949 in Zlín. After grammar school, he began to study at the College of Agriculture in Brno, which he had to leave in 1970. He then tried several times to apply for positions in other natural science colleges and, in the meantime, worked in a number of jobs; for example, in the Olomouc Zoo, at the zoology department of the Moravian Museum and also, for over ten years, at the forest protection department of the Forestry Faculty of the Brno College of Agriculture. From the beginning of the 1990s, he was self-employed, particularly as a scientific illustrator. At that time, he created hundreds, if not thousands, of beautiful, detailed morphological illustrations for a large number of European entomologists.

Karel devoted the whole of his life to entomology. He started as a collector of insects in general, obtaining, for his time, an outstanding compendium of knowledge about this group of animals. A few years later, he began to specialise in beetles (Coleoptera), first in the family Leiodidae. By the age of 23 he had already started his faunal observations, which were published in 1980 as his first original work. Later, when he was working in Brno, he turned his interest to the family Melyridae (sensu lato). Karel soon became a leading expert in this field, acknowledged by entomologists world-wide. He wrote his first systematic work in 1982, and in his lifetime authored 45 specialist studies published in the international journals of six European countries. His last paper is devoted to South American fauna, and is currently being published in Chile. He described dozens of new species, genera and other taxa including three new families; he even studied Tertiary fossils in Baltic amber. During the last months of his life, Karel worked, together with his long-time friend Vítězslav Kubáň, on another breakthrough study, this time on the jewel beetles (Buprestidae, Agrilinae, Coraebini).

In the course of his studies, Karel visited many museums abroad, for example, in Paris, Basel, Geneva, Vienna, Berlin and Dresden. Naturally, he collected beetles as well;
he went to the Balkans first, later to middle Asia, and after a prolonged break to south-east Asia. He was in Thailand in 1996, and two years later in India and the Andaman Islands with his son. Unfortunately, a severe leg injury he suffered during this last journey was to have fatal complications. Several new insect taxa that he brought back from his travels were named after him in his honour, such as *Ebaeus majeri* ŠVIHLA from Uzbekistan or the subgenus *Majerus* WITTMER (Malachiidae).

Karel particularly specialised in the taxonomy of several families in the superfamily Cleroidea (Coleoptera). His most significant works on higher taxonomy include a detailed morphology of the family Melyridae (1986) as well as a completely new classification of this family (1994). In his last work he divided the extensively approached Melyridae into six families: he re-included four of them at family rank, and described two new ones (Attalomimidae and Mauroniscidae). He divided the newly defined Dasytidae into six subfamilies, and one of them, Gietellinae, was later promoted to a family (1994). Apart from this original work, Karel was the author of several distinguished revision studies, dealing with generic and species taxonomy within the family Dasytidae. All his works feature detailed descriptions, an excellent knowledge of morphology and, especially, a large number of superb ink illustrations.

Karel passed away in the middle of unfinished work, and there remain several incomplete projects of his. In the field of insect taxonomy, a complete revision of the family Malachiidae higher taxa (up to the genus level), for which he drew over a thousand detailed illustrations years ago, is of particular note. From last year, he had in store a few hundred illustrations relevant to jewel beetles morphology (Buprestidae),...
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which were intended to accompany a planned revision of the tribe Agrilinae. In recent years, Karel created extensive database files containing information that could be used by a wide spectrum of zoologists. Further, he assembled a large address book of entomologists and institutions, and put together a Cleroidea electronic catalogue relating to detailed maps of the world. All these works were near completion.

Although Karel was, above all, an entomologist, it is impossible not to remember him as a very friendly and popular person, with a great sense of humour and fun. At the same time, he was rather modest, a fact proven by the reproduction of his New-Year ‘PF’ card of 17 years ago, in which he pictured himself as a barefoot pilgrim, humbly knocking on the door of the Temple of Taxonomy.

Bibliography


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