

IN MEMORIAM: DR SERGEJ DIMITRIJEVIČ MATVEJEV, 1913-2003

V spomin: dr. Sergej Dimitrijevič Matvejev, 1913-2003



Figure 1: Dr Sergej Dimitrijevič Matvejev, 1913 – 2003

Slika 1: Dr. Sergej Dimitrijevič Matvejev, 1913 – 2003

I became acquainted with Dr. Matvejev in the early 1990s, when chancing upon his book “Distribution and Life of Birds in Serbia” in the bookshop of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Another couple of years passed, before I learned that the author was actually not only alive but still a very active ornithologist.

My first personal contact with him dates to the time when he rang us during the founding meeting of the League for the Ornithological Action of Serbia and Montenegro, congratulating us on the initiative and offering us some of his books for our future library. This was a special honour for me, considering that it is the amateurs who normally attempt to make contact with the experts, while on this particular occasion the communication took place in the very opposite direction.

A few days later I visited Dr. Matvejev at his home in Belgrade. This time I was somewhat surprised to learn, that he had first graduated in architecture, that he published his first ornithological work (on the Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*) in 1938, and during World War II finally graduated in biology as well. I always imagined somehow that he had been recording birds’ folk names by inquiring about them from simple country people, but the actual process was quite the opposite. He always carried out the preparatory work on the birds, which he either caught during his fieldwork or obtained from farmers, on the spot himself, and this gave him a chance to gather these people around him and learn more of the details he was interested in. Dr. Matvejev’s bibliography numbers 219 titles (208 scientific works and 11 books).

Here are some details from his biography (ŽIVKOVIĆ-HRISTIĆ 2003): He was born in 1913 in imperial Russia and in 1921 emigrated with his family to Kragujevac, Serbia. In 1938 he obtained his diploma in architecture, but was in the same year invited, on the recommendation of the ecologist Dr. Siniša Stanković, to work for the Museum of the Serbian Countryside (today’s Natural History Museum in Belgrade). In 1940 he began to study biology at Belgrade University, and obtained his Ph.D. in 1959 from the University of Ljubljana. His fieldwork, which began in 1938, lasted until 1983. From 1947 to his retirement in 1976 he worked at the Biological Research Institute “Dr. Siniša Stanković” in Belgrade.

As an associate of the Fauna Committee, functioning within the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, he studied, apart from birds, the ecology of relict grasshoppers of the Balkans. At the Biological Institute of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences of Arts in Ljubljana he worked, together with botanist I. Puncer, on the chart of habitat types in Slovenia and other republics of the former Yugoslavia (MATVEJEV 1989, MATVEJEV & PUNCER 1991, MATVEJEV 1993, MATVEJEV & LOPATIN 1995).

Through the disintegration of Yugoslavia he experienced, in Slovenia, the third war in his life, and then also witnessed the bombardment of Belgrade to which

V spomin / In memoriam

he had returned in 1996. Dr. Matvejev donated his scientific works (bound notebooks, files, photographs, reprints, books, manuscripts) to the Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Belgrade.

While visiting Dr. Matvejev in Belgrade, he showed me a number of his photographs. I was particularly impressed by the scene of a young architect with a rifle on his shoulder, riding across the terrain he was investigating immediately after World War II.

I planned to visit him again, as I wished to take my copy of his "Distribution and Life of Birds in Serbia" with me and ask him for a dedication in it, but he died suddenly.

Dr. Sergej Dimitrijevič Matvejev passed away on 27 June, 2003, at his home.

Dr. Matvejev was, and still is, the father of Serbian, Yugoslav and Balkan ornithology. While investigating the birds of Kopaonik (about which he published a number of books), he saw himself as continuing the work of Dr. Josif Pančić. All those of us who study and protect the birds of our country are successors to Matvejev, Pančić, and others, and continue their work. As long as we too are dedicated to the study of birds, these great men will continue to live in us.

References:

- ŽIVKOVIĆ-HRISTIĆ, Z. (2003): Bibliografija radova S.D. Matvejeva 1938-2003 u Arhivu SANU. Prilog 84, Beograd. (a script)
- MATVEJEV, S.D. (1989): Karta tipova predela (bioma) Jugoslavije i njena upotrebljivost u biogeografiji. III simpozijum o fauni SR Srbije. Srpsko biološko društvo. Zbornik referata i rezimea, Beograd: 33-36.
- MATVEJEV, S.D. & PUNCER, I.J. (1991): Landscape Types of Yugoslavia – a Map of Biomes. 2nd abbreviated Edition. Ljubljana.
- MATVEJEV, S.D. (1993): Biomi Slovenije. Enciklopedija Slovenije 3. Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana.
- MATVEJEV, S.D. & LOPATIN, I.K. (1995): Kratka zoogeografija sa osnovama biogeografije i ekologije Balkanskog poluostrva. Izdanje S.D. Matvejeva, Ljubljana.

DRAGAN SIMIĆ
League for the Ornithological Action of Serbia and Montenegro