

IN MEMORIAM
Professor Maria BEIGER (1921-2007)

ANDRZEJ NOWOSAD

Department of Systematic Zoology, Adam Mickiewicz University,
Umultowska 89, 61-614 Poznań, Poland,
e-mail: nowosada@amu.edu.pl

KEY WORDS: natural sciences, zoology, entomology, biography.

Late on Wednesday February 7, 2007 we received the unexpected news of the death of Professor Maria BEIGER - professor emeritus of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, a first-rate scientist, zoologist, entomologist, parasitologist, highly distinguished teacher and mentor of many generations of students, and long-time head of the Department of Systematic Zoology. That evening we exchanged with great sorrow the sad news that our Professor had departed from us for ever.

Looking back at the life of Professor Maria BEIGER we can see how very well she served not only her own University, the Biology Faculty, our Department, close colleagues and several generations of students, but also higher education in Poland and Polish science generally. Polish zoology has suffered another irredeemable loss. Until the end she remained devoted to her scientific passions - entomology and hyponomology. She was also faithful and devoted to people, and not only those closest to her with whom she worked, whom she educated and to whom she passed on her own knowledge and ideals. This is demonstrated by little-known episodes in her life: in September 1939 she volunteered for the Polish Army's medical battalion, and as a nurse for the Polish Red Cross brought assistance to soldiers injured in fighting near Sochaczew, Modlin and Warsaw. She was also one of the first to answer an appeal for help for the victims of the Armenian earthquake in 1988.

There is for us in Maria BEIGER'S death a certain mystery and a message. It is as if she wanted to convey to us a few last unspoken words: "*Work diligently and use every moment that life gives us.*" As if she wanted to stop the flow of time in order to make sure that all her loose ends were tied up. And that was her first "message" for us. We should remember that in 2004, three years before her death, at 83 years of age, already very ill and having difficulty even moving around the house, she wrote and put into print an important piece of work - an extensive and richly illustrated monograph on "*Poland's Mining Insects*"¹. This is the first guide to identifying mining insects in Poland on the basis of their burrows. It also contains data about the trophic relationships, biology, harmfulness and distribution of particular species within Poland, as well as extensive description of the group. The guide is made easier to use by a wide selection of illustrations. This monograph is helpful in the education of students of biology and those training for work in agriculture and gardening. It will also be of use to those working for in plant protection.

The second "message" reached us on the Wednesday on which she died. That very morning we had delivered to the museum at *Collegium Biologicum* (the new headquarters of the whole Biology Faculty of Adam Mickiewicz University, at Umultowska 89, Poznań) the scientific collections accumulated by Professor BEIGER over many years - an impressive set of cecidia and mining insects and dried samples of damaged leaves of trees and shrubs. The collections, originating from many regions of Poland and Europe, had been painstakingly classified, described, filed and preserved by Professor BEIGER. They occupied two whole shelves in the new museum. When completing the transfer of the collections that day, we were not aware that the Professor was feeling very poorly, and that we were fulfilling her last wish by securing the collection representing her life's scientific work, of great research value to many generations of biologists. It was as if she was waiting for the completion of the work to secure her valued collections. Only then could she finally go to rest in peace.

These two "messages" are an excellent supplement to our description of the late Professor Maria BEIGER. Always precise, organized, foresighted, well-prepared, dutiful, demanding, unbending in her decisions and consistent in the way she lived.

We have lost someone of great stature - modest, irreproachably honest, courageous, noble, wise - who carried great authority and in whom we had the greatest respect and trust. And we, her pupils, have had the good fortune to be in contact on an everyday basis with the Professor - a renowned zoologist in the research fields of taxonomy, systematic classification, biology and ecology of mining insects, whose rich scientific legacy has made a permanent contribution to worldwide knowledge.

We will remember Professor BEIGER as a superb academic teacher, who lectured as a professor of the faculty for more than 40 years. She had a gift for teaching. Her lectures were a model of clarity and set a perfect example of the content and form of academic teaching. She taught with enthusiasm and passion. She was able to arouse her students'

¹ BEIGER M., 2004. *Owady minujące Polski*. Bogucki Wydawnictwo Naukowe. Poznań. 894 pp.

interest, as can be seen from the many master's, doctoral and advanced theses produced under her guidance.

Professor BEIGER was also a model organizer. On modest state grants, she ran our Department superbly and maintained her predecessors' focus on entomological, theriological and parasitological research. (Her teachers included the brilliant zoology professors Kazimierz SIMM and Waław SKURATOWICZ.) She also looked after and enriched the museum collections and extensive library (with its valuable collection of antique books), ensuring that they matched the fields of research carried out by the Department.

In spite of her numerous professional duties, she also found time for her outside interests: literature, art and travelling.

Her funeral took place on Thursday February 15, 2007. It was preceded by a mass at the Church of the Virgin Mary on Wildecki Market Square in Poznań, and she was buried at the cemetery of St. John Vianney in Poznań, on Lutycka Street. Professor BEIGER was also remembered at a special ceremonial meeting of the University's Senate and Council of the Biology Faculty. The Rector, Faculty Dean and Head of the Department of Systematic Zoology received many letters, telegrams and faxes expressing heartfelt sympathy and sorrow. In those days of sadness we were comforted by the support of many, including those who did not know Professor BEIGER personally, but remembered her valued publications. After many years of collaboration with a wide group of entomologists, she retains a special place in their memory.

We have said goodbye to a devoted woman of science, and join with her family in their sadness.

Received: November 03, 2007

Accepted: November 05, 2007