



Vladimir Beshkov 1935 – 2019

On 23 October 2019, we lost our highly-esteemed colleague and friend, the great Bulgarian zoologist Dr. Vladimir Anastasov Beshkov!

Doctor V. Beshkov was born on 10 September 1935 in the city of Sofia. In 1959, he graduated from the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” and began work at the Institute of Zoology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, where he worked in the next 35 years.

The research of Dr. Beshkov was focused mainly on amphibians and reptiles but, at the same time, he has a number of studies on bats and cave fauna. His scientific contributions in the field of herpetology are numerous and very significant, not only at the national but also the international level. Of particular interest are his studies on snake biology and ecology (first of their kind for the Balkans), the description of one of the longest periodic migrations in amphibians (the breeding migration in the Common frog, *Rana temporaria*), studies on the ecology of the Greek stream frog (*Rana graeca*) and the Common toad (*Bufo bufo*) as well as taxonomic studies on some reptile genera (*Anguis*, *Natrix*, *Vipera*). Although most of his fieldwork was concentrated in Bulgaria, Beshkov travelled extensively and collaborated with prominent European and American scientist, organising and participating in scientific expeditions in countries from Africa, Asia and North America. He was a lecturer of herpetology at Sofia University and supervised a number of MSc theses, which were always characterised by their distinct scientific value.

Vladimir Beshkov was not only an academic scholar but an avid and active conservationist. He is famous for his actions against tortoise poaching – from following poachers on the field and testifying in court to personally ensure they are brought to justice, to educating the general public with informative posters and presentations. He is responsible for the creation of a breeding pond for the Alpine newt (*Ichthyosaura alpestris*, a protected species and a glacial relict) near Petrohan – this is the first and to the present days the only conservation measure of such magnitude for Bulgaria. The establishment of the protected site *Muhalnitsa* near Botevgrad is directly linked to his studies on the breeding migration of the Common frog; it remains the only protected site in Bulgaria specifically dedicated to amphibian or reptile species.

Beshkov retired in 1995 but, until the last year of his life, he continued his work as a zoologist and conservationist, carrying out his field studies and riding on his famous emblematic motorcycle. During this



period, he published the book *Amphibians and Reptiles in Bulgaria* (2002), participated in the second edition of the Red Data Book of Bulgaria (2015) and authored a number of scientific publications.

The complete publishing activity of Dr. V. Beshkov includes over 80 scientific papers, 2 books as well as dozens of popular science articles. The names of a long list of animal taxa described from Europe, Africa and Asia, are dedicated to him in acknowledgement of his contributions across different fields of zoology. A detailed biography article for Beshkov was published in 2015 by his close friend and colleague Dr. Petar Beron (*Dr. Vladimir Beshkov at 80 years of age*).

With the death of Vladimir Beshkov, the Bulgarian zoological community lost not only one of the most active researchers, an excellent specialist and consultant in the field of herpetology and chiropterology but also an inspirational figure for generations of scientists and nature lovers.

Borislav Naumov, Simeon Lukanov & Emiliya Vacheva



Farewell Dr. Beshkov!