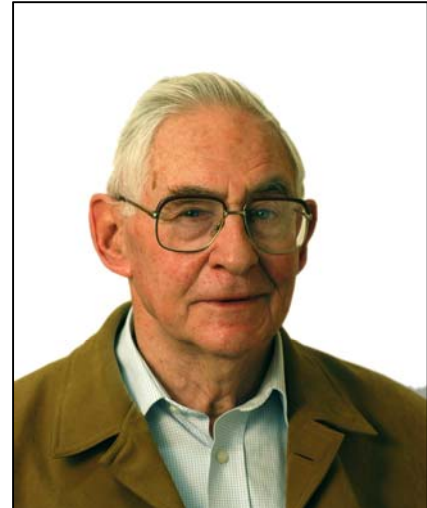


In memoriam Erich Thenius (1924–2022)

The University of Vienna, the Faculty of Geosciences and Geography and the Institute of Palaeontology mourns the loss of one of Austria's best known and scientifically most successful palaeontologists. Emer. Univ. Prof. Dr. Erich Thenius died in Vienna on 29 December 2022, three days after his 98th birthday. He leaves us a huge opus of scientific articles and books but also of popular scientific literature.

Erich Thenius was born on 26 December 1924 in Opatija (Abbazia), Istria. He studied palaeontology, zoology and geology as well as numerous natural science subsidiary subjects at the University of Vienna from 1942 onwards, where he obtained his doctorate in 1946 with the dissertation topic "The Plantigrady of Cave Bears". As early as 1943 he became a research assistant at the Institute of Palaeontology at the University of Vienna, later a university assistant, university lecturer, associate professor and, from 1962, full professor of palaeontology and palaeobiology, retiring in 1985. As head of the institute, he succeeded in significantly improving the staffing of the institute and in additionally creating professorships in palaeobotany, biostratigraphy and micropalaeontology.



The focal points of his research were the fossil vertebrates of recent Earth history, especially of the Tertiary and the Pleistocene, as well as the evolutionary, distributional and phylogenetic history of mammals, but also areas of general palaeontology such as fossilisation, traces of life and living fossils. This research activity has resulted in well over 400 publications. His much acclaimed scientific contributions concerned not only palaeontology, but also many fields of neighbouring sciences such as zoology and geology. He wrote articles in "Grzimeks Tierleben" (1968-1972) and Geology of "Niederösterreich" (Geol. Bundesanstalt 1974). Compiling works on "Stammesgeschichte der Säugetiere" (1960), "Grundzüge der Faunen- und Verbreitungsgeschichte der Säugetiere" (1983), "Niederösterreichs eiszeitliche Tierwelt" (1975), or "Niederösterreich im Wandel der Zeiten" (1983) prove his broad spectrum of knowledge.

Particularly noteworthy is the authoring of standard works in zoological and geological manuals such as in the series Handbuch der Zoologie: "Phylogeny of the Mammalia. Stammesgeschichte der Säugetiere" (1969) and "Zähne und Gebiss der Säugetiere" (1989), as well as in the series Handbuch der stratigraphischen Geologie in 1959 "Tertiär, Band 2".

Erich Thenius' fame is also based on many popular scientific works, here are just a few selected works: „Die Geschichte des Lebens auf der Erde (1955), Oldtimer der Tierwelt“ (1969), Eiszeiten einst und jetzt“ (1973) Fossilien im Volksglauben und im Alltag“ (1996), Lebende Fossilien (2000).

His work is known far beyond our borders and his influence continues to this day. Most recently, a chapter was dedicated to him in the book *The Evolution of Paleontological Art* (2022) in the Geological Society of America.

Thenius was very interested in Plate-Tectonics, wrote an article on Otto Ampferer and his noteworthy contribution to early understanding of the mechanism of plate movements and a booklet called „Das neue erdwissenschaftliche Weltbild: Plattentektonik und ihre Bedeutung für die Geo- und Biowissenschaften“ (1986, The New Earth Science Worldview: Plate Tectonics and its Significance for the Earth and Life Sciences).

Erich Thenius was a member of numerous scientific institutions and he was made an honorary member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, a member of the German Academy of Natural Scientists Leopoldina and a corresponding member of the Croatian Academy of Sciences.

Erich Thenius' death marked the end of a successful life filled with science, which immensely enriched palaeontology and leaves us with many memories of interesting conversations and discussions.

Gernot Rabeder & Friedrich Steininger