

## Obituary

### Francesco Le Moli

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Professor Francesco Le Moli was born in Mosciano S. Angelo (Teramo, Italy) on 15 November 1943. He grew up in Parma (Italy) where in 1969 he completed his M.Sc. degree in Natural Sciences with a thesis on "Sexual isolation of *Drosophila melanogaster* and *D. simulans* (the role of learning)", supervised by Prof. Danilo Mainardi. After he had graduated, he soon began his academic career as teacher of Zoology at the Faculty of Science. As Full Professor of Zoology he spent a four years period (1987 - 1990) at the University of Perugia (Italy). In 1990 he came back to Parma University where he spent the rest of his career as teacher and researcher in the Department of Evolutionary and Functional Biology.

Prof. Le Moli was constantly involved in many activities both within and outside the University of Parma. He was President of the Curriculum for the Degree in Natural Sciences, he held highly responsible positions in the Rectorate of the Parma University, and he was Coordinator of the Doctorate in "Ethology" (Universities of Firenze, Parma, Pisa) and in "Biology of Behaviour" (University of Parma). He was also founding member and President of the Italian Section of IUSI (International Union for the Study of Social Insects), President of the Italian Society of Ethology, and member of the Italian Union of Zoology.

In the course of his outstanding career he founded and increased an active research group that he guided with passion and enthusiasm. His research was mainly devoted to ethological topics and in the last 30 years focused on the behaviour and sociobiology of ants mainly of the genera *Formica*, *Polyergus*, and *Messor*. In broad terms, he was interested in the behavioural ecology of free-living and parasitic ants. He investigated intra- and inter-specific aggression, parental care, communication and inter-individual recognition, social parasitism and the effect of imprinting on it. In particular, his studies on the effect of early experience and the development of both cocoon nursing behaviour and aggression in wood-ant species were pioneering and contributed to solve the problem of the origin of slaves in dulotic ant societies. His subsequent investigations centred on the topic of social parasitism with particular emphasis on reproductive behaviour, strategies of colony foundation, raiding activity, orientation and the comparison of facultative and obligatory slave-making ants. Most recent research fields were related to various aspects of communi-



cation, social organisation, territoriality, and resource competition in different species of ants.

Professor Le Moli was author of more than 200 scientific papers in international journals and organiser of many scientific activities, but he was also involved in popular science.

Francesco Le Moli was a devoted family man. He and his wife Stefania have two sons and a granddaughter, Silvia, born about one year ago.

Eminent scientist and backbone of the Laboratory of Myrmecology (Department of Evolutionary and Functional Biology, University of Parma), on 18 April 2008 Francesco Le Moli prematurely passed away after a brief and acute disease. He leaves an overwhelming gap in the Italian and international scientific community, as well as in the heart of all those people who like us shared many moments of everyday life with him and many years of enthusiastic work.

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