



Michael Fibiger

29 June 1945 – 16 February 2011

“This is unfortunately my goodbye to you, we have had a splendid life together, and I wish you all the best. Thank you very very much. Michael.” This is the e-mail message which we received from Michael the day before he passed away. Better than any words, both the timing and content of the message fully reflect the extraordinary spirit of Michael. Ever calm, even at the very end, an absolute master of the situation even with deteriorating health, joyful for the life he had, and thankful to the companions who had the chance to share with him the passion for moths. We all recall his strength during the preparation of the 12th volume of *Noctuidae Europaea*, when he kept on working on moths daily, and at the same time describing to us the awful things that not only the disease, but also the technology and medication were doing to his body. And he never complained, rather he kept encouraging us...

Noctuidae Europaea is one of the few multi-volume series on Lepidoptera ever to achieve completion (the last, 13th volume, is on the way with Michael’s guidelines for incorporating the major changes in systematics). Fully conceived by him, the determination with which Michael pursued its realization is the only reason for the completion of the series. In addition to writing three volumes in full and a great many chapters, the organizational work which he performed behind the scenes was extraordinary. But it was not just a matter of hard work, as tough as it could be. Rather, it was a result of



Michael and Mariann Fibiger in Villa Adriana (Tivoli, Roma) during Easter 2010.

his special aptitude in establishing good relationships with people, which in a short time led him to be at the crossroad of the world noctuidologist community. After first making contact with him, it would have been difficult not to remain fascinated by his plain, straightforward talking which soon got to the heart of any issue, and of people. Another one of Michael's remarkable features was the trust he placed in people, and people could perceive this confidence he had in them. Professionally he was a psychologist but we do not have any doubts that he became a psychologist because of his personal attitudes and his deep empathy with people. Interestingly, he once defined his psychology as of "*here and now*". He had specialized in managing a vast array of emergency situations from treating survivors soon after an accident to resolving seemingly intractable disputes between employees in a company. Through his professional work, he developed a natural inclination toward solving

problems, and after facing harsh disasters in real life, overcoming silly jealousies regarding collecting specimens or scientific rivalries between entomologists was child's play. Michael was thus able to bring together workers from different lepidopterological traditions, establish friendly relationships with a huge number of entomologists, both professional and amateur, and shape a common ground for sharing of information and study material. In passing, it is worth recalling that he was always willing to support anybody with plenty of material from his private collection, literature, advice, useful contacts and suggestions. We would like to emphasize two points: first, in his approach to specimens and collections – he viewed them as objects embedding scientific information which had to be analysed and communicated, otherwise they would have no value. Thus, although not being a professional researcher, his spirit was that of a true man of science. Second, his talents in enabling communication among lepidopterists have been of lasting value. We cannot, for example, underestimate the importance of his "transatlantic" relationship with Donald (Don) J. Lafontaine (Ottawa, Canada). Admittedly, close cooperation between noctuidologists in the northern hemisphere had already started thanks to the efforts of Vladimir S. Kononenko, Kauri Mikkola, and Don, but was essentially dedicated to purely "boreal" matters. With Michael and Don, the cooperation between the two sides of the Atlantic was extended to a great many subjects and, among others, led to common delimitation of Holarctic genera and classification schemes, with particular regard to the 'trifine' groups of the old sense Noctuidae. And, in recent years, the remarkable amount of knowledge accumulated by them provided the basis for two of the keystone papers on the phylogeny

of Noctuoidea, appearing in *Esperiana* no. 11 (2005) and the *Canadian Entomologist* no. 138 (2006).

The friendly and cooperative spirit of Michael is self-evident from the long list of works he coauthored with a number of colleagues. Among these we may recall the volumes written with Niels Peder Kristensen (*The Sesiidae (Lepidoptera) of Fennoscandia and Denmark*, 1974), Poul Svendsen (*Danske Natsommerfugle*, 1981; *The Distribution of European Macrolepidoptera, Noctuidae 1*, 1992), and Morten Top-Jensen (*Danske Sommerfugle*, 2009). In addition to these is, of course, *Noctuidae Europaea* (1990–2011), his *magnum opus* for which Michael was always greatful to the Carlsberg Foundation for its essential financial support. Last but not least, Michael was responsible, with Hermann H. Hacker, for thorough revisions of the checklist of the European Noctuoidea, and for several taxonomic revisions, faunistic and taxonomic papers on the Old World fauna, mostly appearing in the series *Esperiana*. With Vladimir S. Kononenko as editor, Michael contributed to the systematization of knowledge on the Siberian Noctuids with the series *Noctuidae Sibiricae*. Also, after first describing the smallest macrolepidopteran known to this day in 1997, *Micronoctua karsholti* (named in honor of Ole Karsholt for his surprising discovery), Michael was responsible for the detailed, careful work published in four major publications in the journal *Zootaxa* of a totally overlooked group of small-sized noctuoids, the Micronoctuidae, disregarded by workers focused on macromoths because of their micro-like appearance, and by microlepidopterists inasmuch as they were structurally clearly ‘macros’!

As every good scientist, Michael met with opposition to some of his scientific thoughts, for example from Herbert Beck on the relevant weight of adult versus larval characters in the classification of Noctuidae, but the polemics, if any, always remained within the boundary of the scientific dialectic between gentlemen and science itself greatly benefited from their contrasting views.

Michael Fibiger was born in Copenhagen on the 29th of June, 1945. From an early age he had developed a strong interest in Lepidoptera, and at the age of 13, he joined the Danish Lepidopterological Society, at the time as the youngest member of the society. Subsequently he joined the Danish Entomological Society and the Societas Europaea Lepidopterologica. In all of these societies he acted at times as a council member, notably in the Danish Entomological Society as the chairman and the SEL as the vice-president. We will never forget his thoughtfulness in stepping down from the latter post when another Dane, N. P. Kristensen, was elected president, in order not to overrepresent a single country in the governing body of our society. Michael deservedly received many tributes, above all from the whole entomological community of his homeland at the Zoological Museum in Copenhagen on the 20th of January, 2011 and by the Linnean Society of London, which in 2011 awarded him the H. H. Bloomer Medal. Of his exceptionally long and rich career in psychology he will be remembered for the teaching of several courses, the running of social projects, the coaching and training of students and managers, and the heading of groups, schools, and departments. Michael passed away on the 16th of February, 2011 in Sorø, Denmark, leaving a wonderful family, his wife Mariann and their two sons, Ulrik and Christian. With the assistance of Mariann, Ulrik, and a number of friends, he personally provided

for the return of loans to colleagues and institutions in order to minimize backlog after his passing, and managed the arrangement of his huge collection for its transfer to the Zoological Museum, Danish Museum of Natural History at the University of Copenhagen, where it is now deposited.

Within such a multifaceted personality it is difficult to single out a single quality which may best summarise what he has left to the community of lepidopterists. There are the sound results of his scientific achievements, there are lessons on how to establish fruitful and long-lasting collaboration between researchers, there is the knowledge and technical expertise he has left to a broad array of workers, pupils, and colleagues. But we would like to emphasize that Michael was after all an amateur lepidopterist, and had he been a professional, facing academic competition for positions or grants, probably he would not have achieved what he did. Totally unaffected by the so-called ‘publish or perish syndrome’, he published many of his outstanding results without taking into consideration the current ranking of the journal he was selecting for manuscript submission; similarly, neither did he like seductive titles for his works. He liked real people, travelling for the discovery of new species, and was interested in real things, as in true moth science.

ALBERTO ZILLI¹, LÁSZLÓ RONKAY² & JOSÉ LUIS YELA³

¹ Museum of Zoology, Via U. Aldrovandi 18, I-00197 Rome, Italy; alberto.zilli@comune.roma.it

² Hungarian Natural History Museum, Baross u. 13, H-1088 Budapest, Hungary; ronkay@zoo.zoo.nhmus.hu

³ Facultad de Ciencias Ambientales & ICAM, Zoology section, Sabatini building, Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Avda. Carlos III, E-45005 Toledo, Spain; joseluis.yela@uclm.es