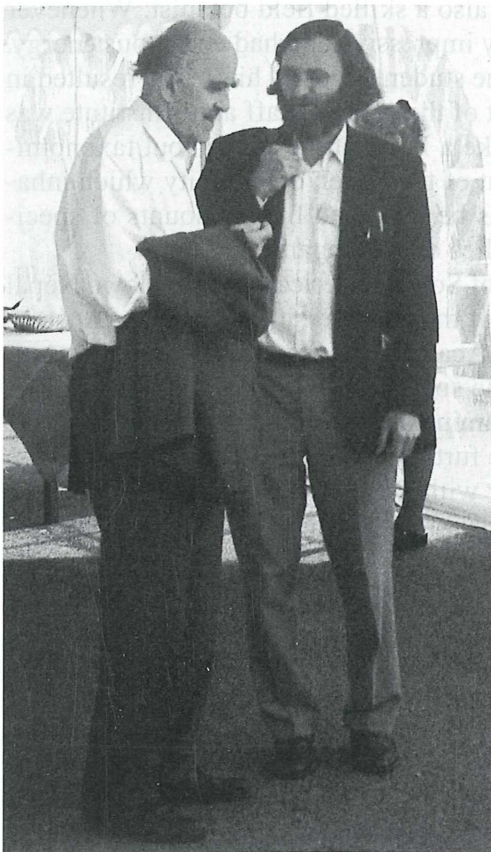


Obituary: Prof. Dr JOSEF POELT



Prof. J. POELT (left) in discussion with
B. J. COPPINS in 1992
Phot. O. BREUSS

With great regret we report the sudden death of Prof. Dr JOSEF POELT on June 3, 1995.

For *Plant Systematics and Evolution* he served as Associate Editor since 1974. It is not my intention to present here a full history of his life and scientific activities. This will be done by his colleagues in *Ber. Bayer. Bot. Ges.* I just want to shed light on the role he played for our journal and will present a short evaluation of his personality. He was one of our active Editors and reviewed lots of manuscripts dealing with cryptogamic botany and thereby helped furthering these organisms in our journal. With his huge scientific knowledge he had the right feeling for what is acceptable or not. He did not hold back what he thought of the scientific content of the submitted manuscripts. But he said it with his very personal touch of Bavarian humour that did not offend the respective authors. He never hid his typical Bavarian dialect which made his speech somehow cosy.

Prof. POELT can best be described as having been one of the last and outstanding universal botanists who was

captivated by the whole large kingdoms of plants and fungi. He was born on October 17, 1924 at Pöcking (Bavaria, Germany). He studied at Munich and completed his Ph.D. in 1950. Then he was employed as assistant in the Botanical Garden of Munich. He became university docent in 1959 and university professor 1965 at Berlin. In 1972 he was appointed as full professor at Graz, where his scientific career found its highlights and untimely stop. There he was head of the Institute of Botany of the university from 1972 until his retirement in 1990. Besides his interest in phanerogams he especially was a famous lichenologist, bryologist and mycologist. During the years he was honoured by a lot of international awards of

botanical, lichenological, bryological and mycological societies. Many of his contributions to science are classicals and internationally well known. For several generations of scientists and students his unparalleled and comprehensive key to the Lichens of Europe was - and still is - an invaluable source of information for taxonomic and field work. He had great interests in taxonomy, morphology, ecology and evolution of his studied objects and worked with classical approaches. He did not adopt molecular techniques or cladistics, which came into sight rather late in his life. Though he did not disapprove the new techniques, he left them for the younger generations.

He was not only a great taxonomist but also a skilled field botanist. Whenever I met him I had great respect as he was very impressive and had enormous energy. He was a gifted teacher, always having some students around him. This resulted in professionally educated scientists and most of the present staff at his institute was trained by him. On field trips he could make a fascinating story about taxonomical, ecological and evolutionary aspects out of the lichen community which inhabited a single rock wall. On his excursions he collected huge amounts of specimens which will be the base for future studies of cryptogams.

Besides being fascinated by the lichens of South America, the Himalaya, Nepal and Scandinavia, he never forgot to support the biodiversity research in Austria. As corresponding member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences he had a continuous interest in the cryptogamic parts of the so-called *Catalogus Florae Austriae*. Knowing the host plants, he was able to examine the rust fungi. Thus, he wrote the first compilation of Austrian rust fungi. He further coauthored the comprehensive bibliography of Austrian lichens (together with Prof. R. TÜRK, Salzburg) for the *Catalogus*. He always warned that Austrian (and Central European) botanists and mycologists are only interested in tropical botany and neglect the nearest environments. And he was right. Nowadays biodiversity exploration becomes more and more important even in Central Europe as a basis for environment protection attempts. In his scientific work he did not tarry to publish his results as he considered it important to share all these results with the scientific community.

At his institute he early recognized the necessity to enlarge space for the herbarium, for the living collections and especially for his research colleagues and the growing community of students. So, he continuously fought for renovation of the building and finally succeeded. The institute now owes to him a new glass-house, a larger garden and a renovated building with good conditions for the collection materials.

Many colleagues and students were stimulated by his enthusiasm and he was a searched adviser and even companion. In his modest and caring manner he tried to help whenever and wherever he could. He took special care of Eastern European colleagues and his guest room housed many scientists from all over the world. He liked discussions on various scientific matters, on taxonomy, systematics and evolution but also on university policy or the governmental educational system. In his modesty he disliked attending big congresses, he preferred personal contacts with colleagues and small working groups.

One would not cover fully Prof. POELT's individuality not mentioning his interest in history, architecture and music of different peoples of the world. On his

numerous field trips he did not only collect plants and fungi but he also studied the human beings and their history.

He founded a family and has two daughters. After the decease of his wife he alone took care for them in his responsible way.

Prof. POELT will be missed by all who knew him. He was a great man whose impression on those who had the luck to meet him in scientific or personal connections will furtheron exist!

I. KRISAI-GREILHUBER