

Profile of Erika Wikus

Erika Wikus was born in Fronsburg (Austria) on 5 December 1929. She acquired a doctorate in philosophy with a major in botany at the University of Vienna in July 1952.

The author lives in Italy and is professor emeritus of Plantgeography at the University of Trieste. She is married to Alessandro Pignatti, prof. emeritus of the University “La Sapienza” of Rome. They have one daughter, four sons and 6 grandchildren.

Erika has authored over 130 scientific works on alpine and mediterranean flora and vegetation and wrote a book “Profumo di Pane” (The Scent of Bread), in protest against Western-style consumerism.

From her extensive research trips with her husband to all continents, she has developed a wide knowledge of, and interest in, the flora and fauna of different areas. In particular a special interest in the vegetation of Western Australia and its deserts has evolved over thirteen visits and expeditions during the last 25 years.

Exploring the desert area she discovered a special reaction in herself that was not only due to the observation and study of plants and animals of the place, but also a personal challenge for deep meditation and reflection about the great existential themes of life. The author loves to “follow in the footsteps” of the Aborigines who in time gone by were walking over those sunburnt deserts on their “Songlines” since Dreamtime in the eternal quest for water.

With this Leitmotiv in her book “Nel Deserto australiano, diario di una naturalista” the author identifies herself with the landscape and the itinerant people of the Australian deserts with emphasis on the marvels and surviving strategies. Sadly, the Aborigines, for diverse reasons, had to abandon the homeland where they had been living for tens of thousands of years. Deeply felt personal reflections on this reality fill the pages of the diary she kept on a recent expedition in the outback of Australia. Her finely detailed account, accompanied by a considerable number of drawings and photographs, of those days spent in the Australian desert, aims to evoke in the reader the same desire and enthusiasm she felt on discovering this “lost paradise”.

Besides her special interest for Western Australia, Erika Wikus together with her husband have one major publication (book) in print, i.e. “Plant Life of the Dolomites” (Editor Springer, Heidelberg), probably in 2012 as well as another publication on “Flora and Vegetation of archaeological areas in and around Rome”, the latter together with Fernando Lucchese, co-author, will be published in Quaderni di Botanica ambientale e applicata, Palermo within the current year.