

In memoriam of Heidi Günthart (1919 – 2023)Roland Mühlethaler¹, Hannelore Hoch

Heidi Günthart 2006 (Alp Flix, Switzerland)
(Photo W.E. Holzinger)

Our dear colleague and friend, Heidi Günthart, passed away on 24 April 2023 shortly before her 104th birthday.

Heidi was born in Zurich (Switzerland) on 8 June 1919, the youngest child of an architect and attended school here. She has been interested in nature since childhood, including beekeeping, flowers and birds. In 1938 and at a time it was not common for women to study natural sciences at male-dominated universities, she started her entomological studies at the ETH (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule) Zurich. During the Second World War many of the male employees were called up for military service. As a result, Heidi was employed as an assistant to Prof. Dr. O. Schneider-Orelli, often to take over the duties of missing lecturers. During this time, she also met her future husband Ernst Günthart, who studied

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agronomy and applied entomology and obtained a doctorate in entomology. His later employment at the Maag company in Dielsdorf (canton Zurich, Switzerland) made them to move there, where they raised their two daughters Astrid and Madeleine.

Thanks to the excellent infrastructure of the Maag company, which Heidi Günthart was able to use, she began her studies on leafhoppers, especially within the subfamily *Typhlocybinae*. Her precise and comprehensive observations of host plant preferences and life cycles in the *Typhlocybinae* are still unrivalled. She reared many species over several generations and was thus able to study morphological variability in depth. Although this involved a great deal of effort, it was the only way to document, for example, the change in wing colouration in the genus *Zygina* Fieber, 1866 and Heidi was finally able to clarify some taxonomic problems in leafhoppers. With such experiments she has revealed that individuals of *Zygina pruni* Edwards, 1924 are not yet fully coloured individuals of *Zygina flammigera* (Fourcroy, 1785) and that the two species are therefore synonymous. Heidi was thus undisputedly one of the pioneers of biotaxonomy. Furthermore, she described two leafhopper species from Switzerland that were new to science: *Zygina schneideri* Günthart, 1974 and *Adarrus ernesti* Günthart, 1985. But she was also interested in economically important leafhoppers, which caused problems in vineyards in Southern Switzerland, such as *Hebata (Signatasca) vitis* (Göthe, 1875) and *Scaphoideus titanus* Ball, 1932.

In addition to her biotaxonomic studies, she focused on faunistic aspects, especially in the Swiss Alps (mainly in the Lower Engadine and the Swiss National Park). Thanks to her sampling activities, the knowledge of the Swiss Auchenorrhyncha fauna was significantly improved. Over more than 60 years, Heidi Günthart built up an important collection with mainly Central European Auchenorrhyncha species. In 2012 she donated her collection, in which around 90% of the species known from Switzerland are represented, to the Natural History Museum Basel (NMB). With the recently finished integration of Heidi's collection, the NMB houses now the largest collection of Swiss Auchenorrhyncha, which also strengthens the importance of the Hemiptera collections in Basel (Wyniger & Burckhardt 2012, Mühlethaler et al., in prep.).

Heidi Günthart's scientific work is reflected in almost 40 publications (a detailed list can be found in Mühlethaler & Burckhardt, 2009), although she has repeatedly emphasised that the focus was not on publication, but on the joy of research. Over the years, she has actively participated in numerous scientific congresses and conferences including the International Auchenorrhyncha Congresses and the Central European Auchenorrhyncha Meetings of the "Arbeitskreis Mitteleuropäische Zikaden". In 1984, together with her husband, she organised the 5th International Auchenorrhyncha Congress in Davos, which all participants certainly remember fondly to this day. Despite her advanced age, Heidi also participated in the 13th Central European Auchenorrhyncha Meeting on Alp Flix (Grisons, Switzerland) in the summer of 2006 and accompanied all field excursions with great enthusiasm.

It is particularly worth mentioning that Heidi Günthart carried out all her studies in her spare time alongside running the household, gardening and bringing up her two daughters. She was the first woman to be awarded honorary membership by both the Swiss Entomological Society and the Zurich Entomological Society. She also received the Medal of Honour of the SIEEC (Societas Internationalis Entomofaunistica Europae Centralis) in 2001.

Heidi and Ernst were formidable hosts. They invited and entertained colleagues from all over the world in their house in Dielsdorf, many of which became close friends. Apart from being an outstanding entomologist, Heidi had also an inquisitive mind and was interested in the arts, literature, poetry and music, and she was an excellent gardener and lover of roses. Spending time with Heidi always was an inspiration, in many ways.

All those who knew Heidi personally will sorely miss her exceptionally friendly and courteous attitude, her practical knowledge and encouragement, her enthusiasm and, last but not least, her fine sense of humour.

Literatur

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