

Obituary

To the memory of Professor Pavel Marikovsky (1912 - 2008)

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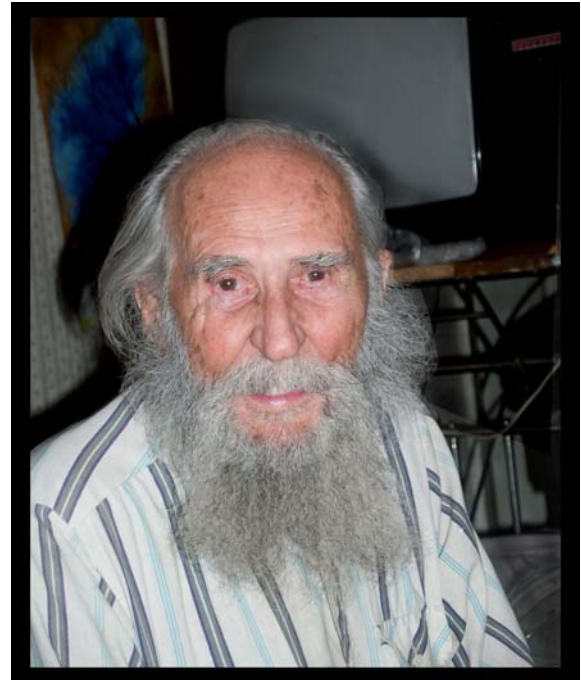
Myrmecol. News 12: 216 (online 29 June 2009)
ISSN 1994-4136 (print), ISSN 1997-3500 (online)
Received 1 June 2009; accepted 1 June 2009

Pavel Marikovsky, a "taiga-man" by his boyhood and a poet of deserts and steppes by his odd destiny, died in Kazakhstan, on 10 November 2008, at the age of 96. Marikovsky was a great entomologist who possessed encyclopaedic knowledge and wrote not only scientific papers but also dozens of popular books about insects, mainly ants. Several generations of Russian entomologists have grown with his books, including myself.

Pavel Marikovsky was born into the family of a parochial school teacher, in the vicinity of Vyazemskaya railway station, in the Khabarovsk edge of the Usury taiga. As a school boy he took part in a Far East expedition of Professor Konstantin Skryabin, a famous Russian parasitologist. He finished school at the age of 16, then served as a school teacher and as a research assistant in the Khabarovsk Institute of Plant Protection. After completing studies at the Far-East Medical University, he stayed at this university, working as a research assistant and then assistant of the Anti-Plague Institute, and as Deputy-Head of the Department of General Biology (1937 - 1939).

In 1939 he moved to the Institute of Microbiology and Epidemiology of the Uzbek Academy of Science. He defended his PhD thesis, "The venomous black widow spider", in 1941. During the World War Marikovsky served as a medical officer in the army and finished it with the rank of a Major of Medicine. From 1946 to 1956 he was Head of the Laboratory of Entomology in the Institute of Zoology of the Kyrgyz Academy of Science. His higher-doctorate thesis, for obtaining his Doctor of Science degree, defended in Leningrad in 1949, was again devoted to venomous spiders.

In 1956 Marikovsky moved to Siberia where he became Head of the Department of Invertebrate Zoology at Tomsk State University. During this period of his life he became interested in ants. He published several papers in Russian scientific journals on ants' territorial behaviour, social organization and "language behaviour". A gifted naturalist, he was the first to decipher several "words" of the "antennal language" in carpenter ants and red wood ants, such as signals of food exchange and alarm signals.



Pavel Marikovsky in 2006 (photograph by Prof. Dr. Victor Glupov ©).

In 1961 Marikovsky became Head of the Laboratory of the Institute of Zoology of the Kazakh Academy of Science in Alma-Ata. From then on his life was devoted to the nature of Kazakhstan. During his scientific life he published about 150 scientific papers and two monographs on systematics, ecology and behaviour of spiders and insects, mainly ants. He conducted pioneering investigations in many fields. For instance, he was the first to describe social life in desert isopods in the 1970s. More than 20 PhD students defended their dissertations in entomology under his supervision. His scientific interests stretched far beyond entomology. He constantly studied petroglyphs, found probably tens of thousands of rock engravings in Kazakhstan and published a series of papers about hunting ways and hunting objects in ancient humans. He braved a last field trip to Balkhash desert at the age of 90. In 2007 Marikovsky was highly honoured by the Central-Asian Geographic Society. Finally, he was an artist and created many pictures of mountains, deserts, and archaeological artifacts.

Pavel Marikovsky named himself a "captive of Nature". In truth, he was a knight of Nature, bringing forth its secrets to enrich human awareness.