



Yuri P. Nekrutenko

30.04.1936 – 12.06.2010

It happened in the Lepidoptera collection hall of the Museum für Naturkunde during the late 1990s. Outside, the east wing of the imperial building was still in ruins, bombed during World War II. To the left of me were the rows of wooden cabinets. Above, the high ceiling and to the right the windows with the wooden frames on which the imperial colour was still visible but peeling off. An old man came up to me, unhurried, thoughtful and hobbling, using a walking stick in his right hand. He introduced himself to me as Yuri Nekrutenko. Only several months later did I learn that Yuri was walking on only one leg, the other replaced by a full prosthesis, a situation that prompted him to say that he had already died as a field entomologist. During this stage of his life, Yuri spent months at German Natural History Museums curating butterfly collections and writing type catalogues, earning some additional money for his life in Kiev.

Yuri Nekrutenko was born on April 30, 1936 in Kiev, into a family of an artist of the Ukrainian Theatre and a movie studio. In 1941, Yuri together with his mother, was evacuated to Uzbekistan. He went to school in Urgut, a small town at the foothills of the Zeravshan mountains. During this time he developed his interest in butterflies. It was in Urgut, where he saw his first “*machaon*”. After secondary school he entered the Biological Faculty of the Shevchenko University in Kiev. During his University years, along with specialization in zoological systematics, he studied zoogeography, animal

morphology and evolution, using every possible opportunity to collect butterflies during student's practical field studies. At the same time, he also studied human anatomy and histology at Kiev Medical Institute as well as Latin and Slavic languages at the University.

One of the largest Lepidoptera collections in the former Soviet Union, the Sheljuzhko collection deposited at the Zoological Museum of Kiev University, provided him with a sound for base studying Holarctic butterflies. Later, Yuri came in contact with L. Sheljuzhko who lived at that time in Munich, and who became his most important instructor in the taxonomy of Lepidoptera.

In 1958, during his first expedition to the Caucasus, Yuri made contact with Dr E. S. Miljanowski (Sukhumi) and Prof. Dr A. S. Danilevsky (Leningrad), who influenced his first steps into lepidopterology as a field of professional activity.

After his graduation from University in 1962, Yuri was employed as a research assistant in the Division of Quaternary Studies, Institute of Geological Sciences, as a specialist in systematics and zoogeography working on the interpretation of phylogenetic systematics and Quaternary-recent historical zoogeography. Having access to necessary technical facilities, he started his studies on the ultraviolet reflectance wing pattern of *Gonepteryx* butterflies, which resulted in the publication of numerous articles and a monograph, submitted as a doctoral thesis presented in 1969 at the Academy of Agricultural Sciences in Kiev.

In 1967, Yuri was appointed first as junior, and a year later, as senior researcher in systematic entomology at the Ukrainian Plant Protection Institute. There, supported by the Director, Academician V. P. Vasiliev, he concentrated his research efforts on faunal and taxonomic studies of the butterflies of Crimea and the Caucasus, paying a particular attention to nature conservation. From 1969–1979, he was the editor of the Institute periodical "Plant Protection". During this period, every year, from April to September, he explored the Crimea and Caucasus, accumulating a comprehensive butterfly collection from these regions. Today, his butterfly collection is deposited at the National Museum of Natural History of Ukraine.

In 1979, Yuri was appointed full-time lepidopterist and member of the senior research staff of the Schmalhausen Institute of Zoology, Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, by then officially involved in the study of the butterfly fauna of the Ukraine, Crimea and Caucasus. He published numerous articles on the fauna, and the books on the butterflies of Crimea (1985) and the Caucasus (1990) certainly became his most well-known publications.

During the last four years, Yuri was editor of "Zbirnyk prac Zoologichnogo Muzeju", the annual almanac published by Zoological Museum, National Museum of Natural History of Ukraine, where he was employed.

In 2007, Yuri was elected as honorary member of our Society (SEL News 43: 21), and had also been an honorary Member of the Polish Entomological Society.

When I met Yuri, he was living in Kiev with his much younger girl friend Oksana. Yuri first married in 1961, and again in 1970. His two children were born in 1962 (Olga) and 1973 (Anton). He loved to talk about his children, was proud of them and clearly missed them when he was away from Kiev.

Yuri had a really impressive command of languages used to good effect in his editorial activities in Ukrainian, Russian, English and Polish. By 1982, Yuri had been appointed as scientific editor of the *Vestnik Zoologii*, a bi-monthly journal published by the Institute of Zoology. In 1993, Yuri was nominated for the Editor of the newly established quarterly *Journal of the Ukrainian Entomological Society* (published from 1993 until 1998). He also was, from 1997, an active editorial board member of *Nota lepidopterologica*, providing invaluable support to Alain Olivier and myself. In contrast to the modern practice where scientific journals review and often largely rephrase author's manuscripts, Yuri was of the opinion that the individual style of authors should be retained for publication. Regarding his linguistic abilities, I remember well that he asked me only twice during his more than six months work at the Zoological Museum in Dresden to help him in the translation of a part from an original description of a butterfly species written in German. In both cases, I could not figure out the meaning, as the German authors stumbled over their own nested sentences, making it impossible to interpret the text. In editing books, Yuri became an important supporter of Vadim V. Tshikolovets who published on the butterflies of Turkmenistan (1998), Uzbekistan (2000), Transbaikalia Siberia (2002), Tajikistan (2003) and Kyrgyzstan (2005). It has been Yuri's opinion that not everything should be published in English, which is especially important in the case of field guides, which are primarily needed by the local people in certain regions, and thus are important for encouraging nature conservation. Yuri retained his stubborn views on language, planning for the second part of "The Butterflies of the Caucasus" to be published in Russian, like the first part, but could not find a publisher willing to do this and later lost interest. Thus, one of the major projects of his life remained unfinished. However, Vadim Tshikolovets is now preparing a new volume "The Butterflies of Caucasus and Transcaucasia" in the series "The Butterflies of Palaearctic Asia", for which Yuri wrote a comprehensive introduction and provided much support for the entire volume. Thus, his dream of a book on Caucasian butterflies will be fulfilled in the near future. Nevertheless, Yuri was undeterred and especially keen to publish the "The Butterflies of Ukraine" in the Ukrainian language (Nekrutenko & Tshikolovets 2005) and also translated the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature into his mother language (Nekrutenko 2003). Yuri was deeply into love with his home country Ukraine. Once, Yuri and I took a walk along the former "death strip" isolating West-Berlin from eastern Germany. He expressed his heartfelt happiness at the end of the Cold War along with the independence of the Ukraine. How many Ukrainian people did not have this luck! During his final years, Yuri spent much time and enthusiasm translating Mikhail Bulgakov's novel "Master and Margarita" into Ukrainian, a fact that has been acknowledged after his death in the Kiev newspaper "Chreschatik" (June 14, 2010). Yuri would have written a reply to this article, asking why it has not been written in Ukrainian! Yuri was a hard working entomologist. He arose early in the morning, working until late in the evening, even in his 6th decade. He drank a lot of coffee and was certainly a chain smoker, sometimes getting up at night to take a cigarette. His humour was much in evidence, even in serious situations. During one of his visits to Dresden, he collapsed one morning after drinking only coffee for a long time. We called the ambulance. One of us knelt down, bent over him asking "Yuri, can you hear me?" Yuri slowly moved

his head to the left, then to the right and clearly answered “No!” He was dehydrated, and happily, we got him back from hospital the same evening. Yuri visited Dresden three times, curating all butterfly types and the lycaenid collection at the Zoological Museum. I invited him to stay with me, during which we had much time to work, to talk, to see nature and to visit friends. These times will never be forgotten. One major lesson I basically learned from Yuri during this time was editing our journal, *Nota lepidopterologica*. I really enjoyed being taught by you – “Thank you so much, my dear friend!”

MATTHIAS NUSS

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