

## IN MEMORIAM



### **Yuri Apollonovich Ptashkovsky** (1948—2015)

Yuri Apollonovich Ptashkovsky (Юрий Аполлонович Пташковский, in Russian) was born on April 4, 1948, in Khmelnytskyi, Ukraine, and spent most of his life there. He studied at the Khmelnytskyi Electromechanical College, specializing as an electrical technician. He later worked as head of the cinema-photo laboratory of the Khmelnytskyi Municipal Palace of Culture and also led the Children's Photography Club.

Despite his technical education, Yuri's devotion to nature and studies of nature were evident from his early years. From young age, he passionately observed and investigated insects, especially beetles. Yuri started his own private beetle collection at the age of fourteen. He carefully mounted the specimens for his collection and identified them using available entomological literature. By 1978, his collection amounted to about 1,500 species of beetles.

In addition to his studies of natural history, Yuri engaged in artistic metalwork, stamping and photography. Macrophotography of natural objects was his forte.

Much was written about Yuri in the local Ukrainian press (*Radyanske Podillya*, 139, 16.vii.1975, 8.i.1978, *Radyans'ka Ukraïna*, 129 (16335), 3.vii.1975), where he was mentioned as a talented and well-rounded person.



Yuri in his “home lab”, April 20, 2000.

In 1983, Yuri started to work at the Khmelnytskyi Regional Museum of Local Lore, first as an art restorer, then as a technical assistant director (1985–1986) and later as a junior researcher in the Nature Department. In 1993, Yuri designed and built a display of the typical local invertebrates for the permanent exhibition *The nature of the native land* at the museum, and in 1996, he designed and made up a display showcasing 66 species of Polypore fungi.

During the 1990s, Yuri transferred most of his collections to the Khmelnytskyi Regional Museum of Local Lore, including collections of local insects (Coleoptera (ca. 800 spp.), Diptera, Dytioptera, Heteroptera, Hymenoptera, Lepidoptera, Odonata, Orthoptera), other arthropods (Arachnidae, Crustacea, Myriapoda), and Polypore fungi.

Yuri came to Israel on October 28, 1998, joining his eldest son, who was already living in Kibbutz Malkiyya. Yuri settled in Qiryat Hayyim, one of the northern suburbs of Haifa, where he remained for the rest of his life. He worked as a geodesist for the Jewish National Fund (KKL) until his retirement in 2013. From his very first steps in the country, Yuri became fascinated by the incredible diversity of the local beetle fauna, and immediately began collecting insects. Many of his field trips were in and around Qiryat Hayyim, in surrounding fields, and in marine dunes, although he also collected in other parts of the country, particularly in the Upper Galilee, Golan Heights, and on Mount Hermon. Working as a geodesist for KKL, he traveled regularly across northern Israel and was able to assemble a va-



Yuri on one of his fieldtrips to the Upper Galilee, beginning of 2000s.

luable collection of beetles and to photograph them in their natural environment. When the number of his photographed species exceeded 1,000, Yuri came up with the idea of making an illustrated atlas of Israeli Coleoptera.

In 2009, after eight years of intensive work the atlas—the first of its kind—was published. The first edition was in Russian and Hebrew, with only a few printed copies. The second edition of 50 copies was published in 2013 in English, with Russian and Hebrew names of some beetle taxa. The atlas is illustrated with 1,800 color images of 1,655 beetle species, some of them taken by the author and some borrowed from various sources. Some of the taxa are briefly described, others are only mentioned by name and by distribution; identification guidelines and sketches are provided for some species and genera. The books were published at Yuri's own expense. Over the last few years, Yuri began to work on a third edition of his atlas, but his untimely death has interrupted this admirable endeavor.

Yuri passed away unexpectedly, from a stroke, on February 9, 2015. He is survived by his wife Galina, two sons and a daughter.

Yuri's collection of insects amounts to about 4,000 specimens, arranged in 43 glass covered boxes (30×40 cm) comprising specimens mainly from Israel and Ukraine: Coleoptera (23 boxes), Lepidoptera (4 boxes), Dictyoptera (2 boxes), Hemiptera (2 boxes), Hymenoptera (2 boxes), Orthoptera (2 boxes), Diptera (1 box),

Odonata (1 box), small orders (Dermaptera, Neuroptera, Trichoptera) (1 box) and 5 boxes with unsorted insects and other arthropods. Most of the specimens are accompanied by standard printed collection and identification labels in English, occasionally with comments in Russian, and some specimens have handwritten labels in English, Russian or Ukrainian. Yuri's family donated his collection to the National Insect Collection of the Steinhardt Museum of Natural History, Israel National Center for Biodiversity Studies, Department of Zoology, Tel Aviv University. On October 27, 2016, the collection was transferred to the National Collection.

Yuri belonged to that rare kind of inexhaustible enthusiasts—amateur naturalists—in the best sense of this word. He left an important imprint on this world through his books and his collection, which is now accessible to the scientific community. We mourn the death of our friend and colleague, and wish his family a long and healthy life.

We cordially thank Yuri's family for donation of his collection and sharing memories and photographs, and our colleagues from the Khmelnytskyi Regional Museum of Local Lore for supplying important information about Yuri's professional activities.

#### **Yuri Ptashkovsky's books**

PTASHKOVSKY, Y.A. 2009. Жуки Израиля / חיפושיות של ישראל [Beetles of Israel]. Atlas. 200 pp. (in Russian, with Hebrew additions).

PTASHKOVSKY, Y.A. 2013. Beetles of Israel. Atlas-determinant. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Dimyon Printing House, Haifa, Israel. 246 pp.

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