



**Alexandr Mikhailovich Orlov**  
**‘The Cycling Entomologist’**  
**(1964 — 2024)**

Alexandr (Sasha) Orlov was born on 16 December 1964 in Kiev, the capital city of Ukraine, but spent more than half of his life in Odesa, Ukraine (then Odessa, USSR). He was born in an ordinary middle-income family of Mikhail and Alla Orlov, an engineer and an accountant whose only relation to animals was via culinary. However, Alexandr’s grandfather, Alexandr Sheynburg was a professor in the Odesa Medical Institute (recently Odesa National Medical University), so the boy could have a genetic predisposition for the natural history studies. Indeed, since his earliest childhood Sasha demonstrated an inordinate fondness for nature and animals, particularly arthropods. In his early school years, Sasha already had his own microscope and a modest collection of local insects, perfectly mounted, labelled and identified using the available entomological literature. Unlike many young naturalists strongly opposed by their parents, Sasha was totally supported in his interest in nature, particularly by his mother. When Sasha was in Grade 4, she literally brought him to the Zoological Museum of the Odesa State University (recently the Odesa I.I. Mechnykov National University) and introduced him to a coleopterist Prof. Semen Ya. Blinsein (Blinshteyn). Blinsein was amazed by the

perfectly ordered insect boxes with specimens identified and labelled with correct Latin names in the hands of a kid, as well as by the lively personality of the boy, his knowledge and his keen interest in insects. Since then, Sasha was adopted by Prof. Blinstein and turned into his ‘scientific’ son.

During his school years, Sasha went on hikes to the surroundings of Odesa and around the Odesa Region, using these occasions for studying and collecting insects. Sasha’s interest mainly focused on beetles (Coleoptera) and butterflies and moth (Lepidoptera), with the ground beetles (Carabidae) and rove beetles (Staphylinidae) being probably his favorites. He paid particular interest to the beetle fauna of the marine coast.

After the school graduation in 1980, Sasha got severe meningitis and hardly survived; eight of his ten hospital roommates died. Later, he regularly suffered terrible headaches throughout his life.

In 1981, Orlov enrolled at the Odesa I.I. Mechnykov National University, and studied in the Faculty of Geology. At the university he met his future wife, a student at the Faculty of Biology (later cytologist and oncologist), sharing his love to the nature, natural history and hiking. They were often cycling together around Ukraine, at least before 1986, when their daughter was born. Apart of the studies, Sasha very soon started to work at the Zoological Museum, taking care of entomological collections and rearing *Morpho* butterflies (Nymphalidae: *Morpho* spp.), Goliath beetles (Scarabaeidae: *Goliathus* spp.) etc. At the same time, he continued studying the beetle fauna of the riparian zones of the estuaries (limans) along the Black Sea coast around Odesa (Khadzhibey Estuary, Dniester Estuary, Tylihul Estuary) together with Prof. Blinstein. The beetles were sampled by a device designed and made by Sasha himself and most carefully mounted. Sasha invented an interesting pioneering method for mounting small beetles – gluing them to the human hair attached to the entomological pin. Of course, his own hair was widely used for this purpose. Some results of Sasha’s research were later published (Blinstein & Orlov 1990); regrettably, this remains the only Orlov’s scientific publication.

The love to the nature was Sasha’s main stimulus in his life; the formal education, career, promotion and ‘bourgeois’ comfort were completely out of his mind. The young family comprising the parents, two children and a spaniel dog were living in a large single-room flat in the centre of Odesa, with three beds around large terrariums with scorpions, hissing Madagascar cockroaches and other arthropods. Sasha was not interested in the scientific career; he even didn’t pick up his degree certificate from the university. Another Sasha’s hobby was a handwork. He excelled in working with a lathe, drilling machine and circular saw. He made all his entomological equipment by himself, including the boxes and the cabinets. Sasha was earning his living and enjoying his work in different workshops in Odesa, designing and making custom furniture, terrariums, models, and fixing bicycles. For a considerable time, he worked in the Ukrainian Society of Craftsmen and Layout Designers, making models. One of his models – a cutaway over three-meter-long model of a container ship is still

deposited in the Odesa Maritime Academy. However, he often left his work place in order to participate in collecting trips, cycling and hiking.

Sasha went on numerous excursions to warm parts of the former USSR: Caucasus and Middle Asia; the excursions were socio-cultural as well as scientific and a lot of insects were collected along the way. Sasha was particularly proud of the specimens of extremely rare large and impressive ground beetle *Anthia mannerheimi*, occurring within the former USSR borders only very locally in the southern Turkmenistan and southern Uzbekistan (Bousquet 2003; Anichtchenko 2009; Kryzhanovskiy 2019). The extreme (somewhat childish) fondness in *Anthia* caused him make an *Anthia* tattoo on his shoulder (Fig. 6).

At the same time, he went on exploring the insect fauna of Odesa. Occasionally it took somewhat extravagant forms, like seeking for hawk-moths at night in Primorsky Boulevard, the historical center of Odesa, with pockets full of syringes with chloroform. When policemen were attracted to the strange man performing unexpected movements in the very heart of the city, Sasha decided that it would be difficult to explain the situation and preferred to run away and disappear, chased by the police.

Sasha's collecting efforts resulted in 52 boxes of insects (mainly beetles), kept by Sasha's ex-wife in Odesa, and referred in some entomological publications as a private collection of Alexander M. Orlov (e.g. Yunakov *et al.* 2018). Part of the material has been recently donated to the Zoological Museum of the Odesa I.I. Mechnykov National University.

In 2001, Sasha moved to Israel following his parents and grandmother Maya, leaving behind Odesa, old friends, his collections, and his beloved *Anthia mannerheimi*. However, *Anthia duodecimguttata* and *Anthia sexmaculata*, together with ca. 6000 species of Israeli Coleoptera welcomed him. He settled in Jerusalem and pursued both of his old habits: cycling and collecting insects. Riding his bicycle, alone, accompanied by his faithful dog Kubik, sometimes by his friends or his daughter, he travelled all around the country from the Mt Hermon and Mt Meron to the Ramon Crater and the Arava Valley, from the Golan Heights to the coastal dunes, and from the Jordan Valley to the Carmel Range. Like in his young days he paid much attention to the Mediterranean Sea coastal fauna, with many unique findings. He was particularly active in the southern part of Jerusalem, in particular in the Gilo neighborhood, in the vicinity of his flat. Sasha collected at light, turned stones and reared beetles from dead wood and mushrooms, and in 24 years of his life in Israel accumulated a collection of some 3500 specimens, carefully mounted, accurately labelled and mostly identified. The ground beetles, rove beetles, darkling beetles, scarabs and weevils are particularly well represented in Orlov's collection.

At the same time, Sasha had to earn his living, working mainly as a handyman in different construction works, various workshops, and even for a few years as a designer and assistant at the Nature Museum in Jerusalem, renovating their dioramas. His own flat was looking quite like a workshop, full of workbenches, machine-



**Figs 1–8.** Sasha Orlov, ‘The Cycling Entomologist’, in Israel: (1) Mediterranean coast, 26.viii.2014; (2) south of the Dead Sea, 26.iii.2015; (3) Arava Valley, 6.v.2023; (4) probably Judean Desert, 20.xii.2019; (5) Judean Hills, with faithful Kubik, 21.i.2023; (6) Jerusalem, 6.viii.2014; (7) probably Judean Hills west to Jerusalem, 13.xii.2014, photo by Galina Goutnik; (8) Upper Galilee, Nahal 'Ammud, 27.iii.2017. (Source: <https://www.facebook.com/orlov.alex1>)

tools, mechanisms, bicycles, as well as furniture, lamps and other household items made by himself.

In 2020, Sasha generously donated his insect collection to the Steinhardt Museum of Natural History, Tel Aviv University. He only retained one box completely filled with the small ground beetles of the genus *Bembidion*, which comprises several dozens of species in Israel. Sasha was planning to review this genus, but, unfortunately, his plans were not destined to come true.

Although Orlov hardly participated in publication of a single scientific paper, his rich and unique Ukrainian and Israeli collections were used by others and his name appears among the collectors whose material was helpful in the studies of the Ukrainian (Yunakov *et al.* 2018) and Israeli (Friedman & Sagiv 2010; Assman *et al.* 2020; Ibrahim *et al.* 2022; Friedman 2023) beetle faunas, and will be most probably used in the future.

Sasha was an unconventional, impulsive and spontaneous, extremely friendly and joyful, highly communicative and at the same time straight and obstinate person, high-scale amateur entomologist, full of genuine love to the nature, in particular to insects.

Sasha died untimely in Jerusalem on 13 July 2024 succumbing to cancer, survived by his daughter Anna, his son Yuri and a granddaughter.

I would like to thank cordially Sasha's daughter Anna Buberma (Haifa, Israel), his mentor Semen Blinsein (Dortmund, Germany) and his good friend Anastasia (Asya) Novikov (Jerusalem, Israel) for their essential help in preparation of this note.

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