



## Vladimir Il'yich Chikatunov — 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary

Prof. Vladimir I. Chikatunov was born on September 8, 1940 in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan (then Tajik SSR, USSR). His parents originated from Ukraine. His father, Eli (Ilya) was a military doctor, perished near Kharkov in 1943, and, unfortunately, almost nothing else is known about him. His mother Rachel (1904–2000), was born in Kremenchug, graduated from the Kharkov Medical Institute, and was sent to serve as a pediatrician in Tajikistan, where she remained for nearly all her life. Vladimir's grandparents (Fig. 1) and most of his relatives remained in Ukraine and were killed in the Holocaust.

Since his early childhood Vladimir developed a strong interest in nature and natural history. As a youngster he participated in the work of the Young Naturalists' Station in Dushanbe (1952–1958), acquiring skills that got proved to be very instrumental to him in the future (Fig. 3). At that time, he started his career of a traveler, participating in trips to the Tigrovaya Balka Nature Reserve (Tajikistan) and to Issyk-Kul Lake (Kyrgyzstan), and in rafting along the Amu Darya River to the Aral Sea (Uzbekistan). Turning older, he added mountaineering to his hobbies, climbing peaks of the Middle Asian Gissar–Darvaz ranges, and the Caucasus (Armenia, Georgia and Ossetia) (1956–1963).

In 1958, his interest in entomology turned onto a more professional track, when he started working at the Institute of Zoology of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan (1958–1959) as an entomological technician at the Kondar Biological Station and joined expeditions in the western part of the Gissar Range.

Vladimir studied zoology at the Tajik State University, Dushanbe (1959–1967). He obtained his PhD in 1967 from the Tajik University and the Zoological Institute, St Petersburg, Russia (then USSR), under supervision of Prof. I.K. Lopatin, a famous zoologist and entomologist. Vladimir's PhD thesis combined two of his main passions, zoology and mountaineering, and was on the *Composition and ecology of insects of the Alpine part of the Gissar Range*. Vladimir received his DSc degree in 1981 from the Institute of Zoology, Kiev, Ukraine, by submitting a thesis on the *Coleoptera of the mountain regions of Central Asia*. Actually, Vladimir was one of the pioneers of the entomo-faunistic studies of biomes at high altitudes.

Since 1967, Vladimir worked in his alma mater as a lecturer, then as a senior lecturer and associate professor (1970), full professor (1982), Head of the Department of Zoology (1980–1992), and Rector and Vice-Rector (1987–1991). He devoted his time to research and teaching zoology, entomology, biogeography, ecology, microevolution, phenetics and evolution theory, supervising four PhD and over 50 MSc students, both local and from abroad (from Czechoslovakia, Egypt, Germany and Poland). In addition to his numerous pedagogical and scientific duties, Vladimir initiated and in 1987 established the Department of Ecology at the Tajik University, and in 1988–1991 volunteered to lead the Laboratory of Bioindication, working on the industrial pollution of the environment, biological assay of pollution, and on the urban entomofauna.

Vladimir participated in over 20 entomological expeditions to the mountainous areas of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, focusing on collecting beetles and working with the most prominent Soviet coleopterologists and entomologists like I.K. Lopatin, S.M. Iablokoff-Khnzorian, G.M. Medvedev, E.L. Guryeva, O.L. Kryzhanovskij, V.I. Tobias, A.S. Danilevsky, and K.M. Andreeva-Prószyńska. His record of collecting trips across the Soviet Middle Asia is most impressive:

Northern slope of Turkestan Range (1963),  
Badahshan (1964),  
Eastern Pamir and Alay Valley (1965),  
Anzob Pass (3700 m) (1967),  
Kugitang Range, Karakum Desert, Murgab River Valley, Badhyz Nature Reserve, Karabil' Mountains, Peter I Range (1968),  
Aktau and Nuratau Mts (Uzbekistan) (1969),  
Kuramin Range, Fergana Valley, Karakum Desert (1970),  
Peter I Range, Vakhsh Range, Darvaz Range (1971),  
Hozratisho Range (1972),  
Eastern Tien Shan, Issyk-Kul Lake (1973–1974),  
Karategin Range (1975),

Vigskharvi Station, southern slope of Darvaz Range (1976–1977),  
Lower ranges of Southern Tajikistan (1978),  
Kopet Dag Range (Turkmenistan) (1979),  
Peter I Range, northern slopes (1980),  
Tien Shan, western ranges (Chimgan, Pskem, Ugam) (1981–1983),  
Zeravshan Range, Marguzor lakes (1984–1985),  
Gazimaylik Range, Aruk-Tau (1987),  
Peter I Range (1990).

Vladimir leaded several coleopterological international programs, such as the faunistic studies of the Coleoptera of the Eurasian Mountains, and, together with S.M. Klimaszewski (Silesian University, Katowice, Poland), the study of insect forest pests of Tajikistan. Vladimir initiated and coordinated several joint international expeditions to the Soviet Middle Asia: with colleagues from University of Berkeley (1987), Poland, Czechoslovakia and Egypt (1989), with W. Wittmer of the Entomological Museum in Basel (Switzerland, 1990), T. Deuve of the National Museum of Natural History in Paris (France, 1991), and with S.M. Klimaszewski and W. Wojciechowski of the Silesian University in Katowice (Poland, 1991).

Vladimir was famous in scientific circles throughout the USSR and abroad for his phenomenal hospitality. Students and colleagues were meeting nearly daily at his house to discuss diverse scientific topics; foreign guests and Soviet colleagues were treated to most cordial feasts, the table laden with food and drink so nobody remained hungry or thirsty. He also readily helped colleagues with the logistics of numerous expeditions.

Vladimir dedicated much time to the nature protection, playing, in particular, an important role in the maintenance of the Romit (Ramt) Nature Reserve, Tajikistan. He was a member of the Entomological Society of USSR and the Entomological Society of Tajikistan, the president of the Entomological Society of Tajikistan and a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the Tajik SSR.

In 1992, Vladimir and his family left Tajikistan and arrived in Israel, first to Petah Tiqwa and then permanently settling in Lod. The following year with the help of his colleagues Dr Amnon Freidberg and Prof. Dan Gerling, and thanks to support of the head of the collections, Prof. Tamar Dayan, he was employed in the insect collection of the Department of Zoology, Tel Aviv University, his post being funded by the University and by the Ministry of Absorption. From the beginning, he started to work on the *Tamarix* project—extended studies of the entomofauna of Israeli *Tamarix*, a notorious weed in the USA, in order to find its natural enemies—led by Dan Gerling and funded by the USA government, and one-month long collecting trip to Mount Hermon, the highest peak in Israel and one of the biodiversity hotspots in Israel. Participation in both ventures attested supreme entomological skills of Vladimir, and he was accepted as a Curator of Coleoptera in the insect collection of the Steinhardt Museum of Natural History (then part of the Department of Zoology, Tel Aviv University), where he proudly works until present.

Being always an extraordinary collector, Vladimir undertook numerous field trips all over Israel, from Mt Hermon in the north to Elat in the south (including a week-long expedition to the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, in 1998), collected and mounted thousands of beetles, many of them representing species new to science or to the Israeli fauna.

Vladimir's work at Nahal Oren—an "Evolution Canyon" at the Carmel Ridge—together with Tomáš Pavláček (Institute of Evolution, Haifa University) and under the supervision of Eviatar Nevo (Institute of Evolution, Haifa University) should be commended separately. The project lasted several years, and Vladimir and Tomáš meticulously and regularly collected beetles at five stations across Nahal Oren, accumulating a vast material of an enormous scientific importance. In addition to understanding the evolutionary processes, this regular sampling yielded a lot of new and rare species, which usually escaped collectors' attention during occasional field trips. The friendship and collaboration between Vladimir and Tomáš has been lasting for many years, continuing to other projects at Nahal Keziv, on Mt Hermon and in Sinai, and resulting in numerous publications on the Coleoptera of Israel.

Vladimir started his work in the Coleoptera collection in quite a complicated time and situation. The beetle collection actually comprised several collections in various states of integration, preservation and taxonomic treatment: one of the Tel Aviv University, one transferred from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, a private collection of Hanan Bytinski-Salz, and a few smaller collections and students' materials. All were assembled mainly in Israel and the Sinai Peninsula, i.e. areas unfamiliar to Vladimir in terms of their faunas, and generally less studied. Vladimir undertook a Herculean job of cleaning these Augean stables of scattered holdings and merging them into one well-curated and mostly identified collection. And he did this alone, with all beetle families and with very little help from abroad. He became a specialist in all—around 90!—beetle families occurring in Israel, not an easy task, particularly when one has a restricted access to the appropriate literature, colleagues and other collections. Day after day, for many years, spawned in a small—filled with vapours of ethanol, vinegar (from pitfall trap samples) and naphthalene—room with no window, he was making his way through the collection, identifying, moving, pinning, mounting, with great passion and patience, exultant with every interesting finding, a new or rare species, a new locality or a pretty form. This enormous work, made sometimes under strict budget limitations, resulted in a well curated and well identified collection that does not fall short of the world best standards and is accompanied by a continuously updated catalogue.

Vladimir loves all beetles, but there is little doubt that his favourite family is Chrysomelidae, the leaf beetles, although he has also a strong passion for the Tenebrionidae and Coccinellidae.

Vladimir published over 50 articles dedicated to the coleopteran fauna and zoogeography of Israel, including three books on the beetle faunas of Nahal Oren and Nahal Keziv. Being the only professional coleopterist in Israel, he was identifying

beetles for his colleagues and numerous institutions (Ministry of Agriculture, Volcany Center, Haifa University, and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev to name a few). Often, he was not acknowledged for his pivotal contribution to his colleagues' research, but he did not worry about this, seeing the addition of the new and important material to the collection as a top value. After his retirement Vladimir continues his curatorial activities in the collection.

We have a great pleasure to work with Vladimir side by side since 1996. One of us (ALLF) spent many days collecting and mounting beetles, talking about beetles, entomology, biology, history, geography etc., in the cold of the Negev Highlands and in the heat of the Arava Valley, at 2000 m altitude on Mt. Hermon and at -400 m on the banks of the Dead Sea. Vladimir is always positive, quiet, modest, hard-working, always ready to explain, to show, to help, always ready to share a story from his rich personal experience or an entomological anecdote. He is a walking encyclopaedia and, on the other hand, is a very easy to communicate broad-minded person without arrogance or pretense, a most pleasant companion in the field and in the lab. We wish we go on collaborating with Vladimir for long good years.

We are grateful to Mark Volkovitsh (Zoological Institute, St Petersburg, Russia), Thorsten Assmann (Leuphana University Lüneburg, Germany), Gil Wizen (Canada) and the late Vasily Kravchenko (Steinhardt Museum of Natural History, Israel) for sharing photographs.

**A.-L.-L. Friedman**

**M. Mostovski**

The Steinhardt Museum of Natural History  
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**Figs 1–3:** (1) The Chikatunov family in Kremenchug, Ukraine, 1935; top row first from right: probably Vladimir's father; second row from above: Vladimir's grandfather and grandmother, third and fourth from right; third row from above in centre: Vladimir's mother (first from right, in dark cloths) and her sister (in white cloths). (2) Vladimir, Dushanbe, 1942. (3) Young Naturalists' Station, Dushanbe, 1955; Vladimir is on the left. (All photos from the Chikatunov family archive)



**Figs 4, 5:** (4) Vladimir's first professional expedition to Gissar Range, 1958. (5) with a famous arachnologist E.M. Andreeva-Prószyńska, Turkestan Range, 1963. (Both photos from the Chikatunov family archive)



**Figs 6, 7:** Vladimir Chikatunov in the field: (6) in Darvaz, 1968. (7) on Pamir, with I.K. Lopatin, 1969.  
(Both photos from the Chikatunov family archive)



**Figs 8, 9:** (8) Uzbekistan, Farmon-Kurgan, 1969; top row from left: G. Medvedev, Islom, V. Chikatunov, I. Lopatin, Yu. Balashov, Muradali's uncle, Muradali Tadzhibaev, Muradali's brother and S. Medvedev in front of him; bottom row (sitting): Sherali with his sister, Muradali's mother with her grandson and Muradali's sister-in-law (his brother's wife); handwriting of G. Medvedev. (9) Ulugbek-Medrese, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 1969; left to right: N. Filippova (parasitologist, Balashov's wife), V. Chikatunov, I. Lopatin, Yu. Balashov (Head of the Parasitology Lab, Zoological Institute (ZIN), St Petersburg, Russia), S. Medvedev. (Photos Natalia Vinkler, courtesy Mark Volkovitsh from the archive of ZIN)



10

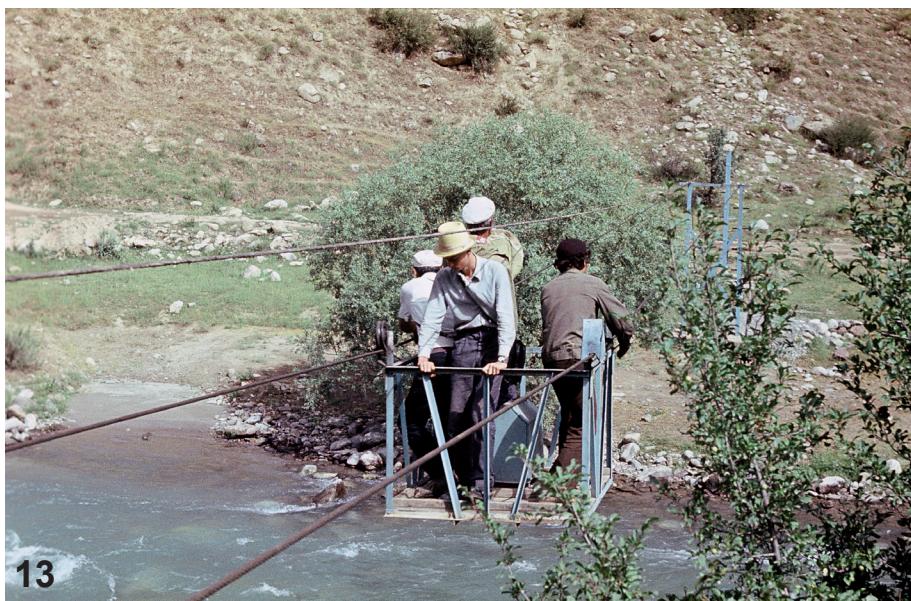


11

**Figs 10, 11:** (10) Dzhar-Kurgan, near Termez, Uzbekistan, 1969; standing: I. Lopatin and V. Chikatunov, sitting: S. Medvedev, the driver and Yu. Balashov (photo courtesy Mark Volkovitsh from ZIN archive). (11) Karakum Desert, Turkmenistan, 1970 (the Chikatunov family archive).



12



13

**Figs 12, 13:** Karategin, Tajikistan, 1975: (12) mid-day break, from left to right: I. Lopatin, V. Chikatunov, G. Medvedev, S. Medvedev, sitting with their backs Pir (PhD student) and Abdusalom Kadyrov. (13) crossing Komorou (Komarou) River, V. Chikatunov on the right. (Photos Natalia Vinkler, courtesy Mark Volkovitsh from the archive of the Zoological Institute, St Petersburg, Russia)



**Figs 14, 15:** V. Chikatunov in Dushanbe, Tajikistan: (14) with his elder son Yuliy at the Department of Zoology, Tajik State University, 1975. (15) with his daughter Polina (presently a well-known dancer and choreographer), 1987. (Both photos from the Chikatunov family archive)



16



17



18



19

**Figs 16–19:** (16) Kafirmigan River, Tajikistan, 1991; left to right: Vladimir's wife Dina, Vladimir and Polina Chikatunovs, unknown sitting, Walter Wittmer, V.G. Dolin. (17) Zeravshan, Tajikistan, 1991; Vladimir Chikatunov with his student Alihon Latifi, who worked on Elateridae. (18) Penjikent, Zeravshan Range, Tajikistan, 1991; Vladimir Chikatunov is second from the left. (19) Vladimir Chikatunov in business attire as a Prorector (Vice-Rector) of the Tadjik State University, Deshanbe, Tadzhikistan, 1988. (All photos from the Chikatunov family archive)



21



**Figs 20, 21:** (20) Zoological Garden, Tel Aviv University, Israel, 1992; Vladimir Chikatunov working on the *Tamarix* project. (21) Jebel-Katarina (Mt St Katherine), Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, 1998; T. Pavliček, a local Bedouin guide and Vladimir Chikatunov. (Both photos from the Chikatunov family archive)



22



23

**Figs 22, 23:** Vladimir Chikatunov on collecting trips in Israel: (22) Nizzanim dunes, 2006, with L. Friedman (right) (photo Gil Wizen). (23) Ma'ale Divshon, 'En 'Avedat National Park, 2007 (photo Thorsten Assmann).



**Figs 24, 25:** (24) Vladimir Chikatunov at Nahal Perat, Israel, ca. 2010, with his former doctorate student Igor Gavrilov, presently a taxidermist at the Steinhardt Museum of Natural History, Tel Aviv (photo Vasilii Kravchenko). (25) Vladimir Chikatunov at the Coleoptera collection, Sherman Building, Tel Aviv University, Israel, 2011 (photo by Moshe Guershon).

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All pre-1989 publications are in Russian, all post-1988 publications are in English, unless indicated otherwise.

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