



**Vasily Dmitrievich Kravchenko  
(1953—2021)**

The Israeli and international entomological community recently suffered a great loss, our dear friend and colleague, the lepidopterist, entomologist and ecologist, Dr Vasily Kravchenko (Vasya or Vasechka for his close friends), passed away prematurely after a long battle with cancer at the age of 68, without having accomplished his research and travel plans.

Vasily was born on 4 April 1953 in Moscow, USSR, to Dmitriy V. Kravchenko, the scientific secretary of Oceanology, Atmospheric Physics and Geography Department of the Academy of Sciences USSR and Sofya Rumyantzeva, a gynecologist. From his first steps, if not from his first breath, Vasily loved animals and was surrounded by animals. Dogs and cats were his constant companions, as well as his tame crow, Karkusha, was his best friend. He undoubtedly inherited this love for animals from his mother, whereas his inclination to science definitely came from his father, who was a geographer and a marine scientist. From his early childhood, his fondness of animals evolved and became a deep interest in the animal life, particularly that of insects.

For most of his friends and acquaintances Vasily was known as an avid butterfly buff, but few knew that his first love were water beetles. The survey of water beetles in streams and pools around Moscow was his first scientific project.

Vasiliy took Grades 9 and 10 in Moscow with biology as a major. His interests in water beetles increased and persisted during his military service. In 1971–1976, he attended the Faculty of Geography at the Moscow State Pedagogical University, supervised by Prof. L.V. Rudenskaya, and studied the ecology of water beetles in the Moscow Region, and was awarded the MSc degree in Biology in June 1976. Since then his interests were mainly devoted to Lepidoptera, particularly to the owlet moths (Noctuidae). During the next ten years he studied the biology of the cotton-pest owlet moths in the Caucasus under the supervision of Prof. E.N. Polivanova and Prof. V.B. Chernishev. He mainly worked in Azerbaijan, visiting it 17 times, but also embarked on 12 research trips to Abkhazia, 9 to Georgia, 8 to Adjara, 4 to Dagestan and Ossetia and 1 to Armenia; in other words, he travelled extensively throughout the Caucasus. In 1977–1991, Vasiliy was a research staff member at the A.N. Severtsov Institute of Evolutionary Morphology & Ecology of Animals of the USSR Academy of Sciences. In April 1986, Vasiliy was awarded a PhD degree in entomology by the same institution for his study of the diurnal activity rhythms and reproductive behavior of noctuid cotton-pests in Azerbaijan.

In 1987, he joined the Soviet-Ethiopian Joint Biological Expedition as a lepidopterist, and this was the beginning of his romance with Africa, which lasted until his last days. Vasiliy worked in Ethiopia, studying biology, taxonomy and faunistics of Ethiopian moths, until 1991 when he immigrated to Israel, opening a completely new chapter in his life. Later he would return to Ethiopia several times.

Vasiliy arrived with his family in Israel on April 26, 1991 and settled in Ashqelon. Later that year he started working in the laboratory of Prof. Dan Gerling in Tel Aviv University, participating in numerous studies in the field of integrated pest management, including the management of the silverleaf whitefly (*Bemisia tabaci*) (Aleyrodidae), management of various cotton pests, the entomofauna of *Tamarix* with an emphasis on biological control agents, the Lepidoptera fauna of the Nahal Oren and the Arava Valley *etc.* Those years were quite a challenge for Vasiliy, as professional difficulties entwined with financial problems, since his own scientific interests and initiatives often conflicted with his routine work and uneasy relations with his managers. Those were the days of conflicts and failures, when Vasiliy often spent his nights in cotton fields or in a small van in the University's Zoological Garden. Finally, in 2000, he was appointed as a curator of the Lepidoptera at the Steinhardt Museum of Natural History, at Tel Aviv University, a position he held until his last days.

Over the years, Vasiliy got engaged in most comprehensive and unprecedented wide-scoped studies of the moth fauna of Israel. He established an array of several dozens of automatic light-traps covering all biogeographical regions of Israel, from the top of Mt Hermon in the north to Eilat at the Red Sea coast, which accumulated material continuously for 4–5 years. He also went on numerous collecting trips throughout the country. Those efforts resulted in a huge wealth of the insect material and in a substantial contribution to the knowledge on the Israeli moth fauna, which

was published in numerous articles. In later years, his interests spread to the faunas of the other countries, and he carried out intensive collecting in Jordan (2011), Kyrgyzstan (2012), Morocco (2013) and in southern Turkey (2013).

Fortunately, Vasiliiy was able to return to Ethiopia and continue his studies of the rich moth fauna of this country, including five long visits in 2006–2010. With the development of his expertise, his interests spread to other African countries, including Mali (2010, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019), Guinea (2015, 2016), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (2016, 2017). He spent months on the banks of the Niger and on the Dagon Plateau (Mali), in the tropical forests of the Salonga National Park (DRC), and on Mt Nimba (Guinea). There he collected intensively, established local collecting stations and trained the locals to continue collecting by themselves. He also carried out several fruitful expeditions to tropical Asia, including Vietnam (2011), Laos (2018, 2019) and Myanmar (2019).

Moths were Vasiliiy's main, but not only, interest. Alongside his studies on Lepidoptera, he participated in studies on blood-sucking Diptera, including *Anopheles* (Culicidae) malaria vectors and *Phlebotomus* (Psychodidae) *Leishmania* vectors, in cooperation with several Institutions in Israel and in the USA. Vasiliiy himself contracted several types of malaria.

Vasiliiy went on most of his trips with his best friend, Günter C. Müller, a lepidopterist, dipterist and medical parasitologist, and with his wife, Zoya Efremova, a hymenopterist, an expert in chalcidoid parasitic wasps. Their collaboration lasted for years.

Vasiliiy authored or co-authored more than 200 scientific publications, and published five books on the Israeli moths (Yponomeutidae, Plutellidae, Argyresthiidae, Noctuidae, Erebiidae and Geometridae). His last book, *The Geometridae of Israel*, was published shortly before his death, and he had a pleasure of holding it in his hands before he passed.

Vasiliiy's scientific interests were highly diverse, including taxonomy, ecology, faunistics, phenology, biogeography, statistics, biodiversity, and medical parasitology. Being primarily a lepidopterist, he was knowledgeable in both taxonomy and biology of other insect groups (e.g., Coleoptera, Diptera, Homoptera and Hymenoptera). Vasiliiy was among those rare scientists who are able to look at their study objects from completely different aspects. For example, the taxonomy and biogeography of moths were inseparable to him from their phenology and host associations.

Vasiliiy was an extremely shy person, but he was never reluctant to defend his opinion, on either scientific or non-scientific topics. His own needs were minimal; according to him, he needed only a table, chair, lamp, computer, and electricity. Food, clothes and other luxuries of civilization were of little interest to him. He only had a soft spot for measuring tools and all kinds of mechanical gadgets, and would immediately envision the ways by which they could be used for his research. His mind was usually preoccupied by thoughts about biological problems, moths,

mosquito traps and travel plans. Nevertheless, he was a very friendly, pleasant and helpful person, possessing a gentle sense of humor and a kind perception of the world.

Being a strong and optimistic person, Vasilij fought his illness relentlessly for several years. Refusing to give up to cancer, he carried out two long and difficult expeditions in Africa and Asia just a year before his death, intensified his efforts to publish the results of his studies, and died while still full of ideas and plans.

Vasilij's positivity and friendliness earned him many friends of all walks of life from around the world. His death is mourned in every place, which he visited and worked in.

Vasilij is survived by his wife and colleague, Zoya Efremova, two daughters, Anna and Olga, and his grandchildren.

Zoya Efremova, Netta Dorchin, Mike Mostovski, Anna Geldin (née Kravchenko) and Olga Kravchenko are gratefully thanked for their help with this contribution.

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

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