

In memoriam of Doc. RNDr. Jaroslav Hrbáček, DrSc.

In 2010 Czech limnology lost its most prominent personality: Doc. RNDr. Jaroslav Hrbáček DrSc. who died at the age of 89. He was a member of the British Royal Entomological Society; honorary member of the Ecological Society of America; honorary member of the International Society for Limnology and holder of its Thienemann's medal "for merits in limnology"; a member and former president of the Czechoslovak Limnological Society; member of the Czech Zoological Society; Scientific secretary, Czechoslovak participation in the "International Biological Program"; scientific secretary of the Czechoslovak Committee for the Project "Man and Biosphere". He passed away after a short illness on 16 July 2010.

Born on 12 May 1921 in Brno, into the family of an official of the Central Board of Pensions and finished his high school studies in the Slovakian capital Bratislava. In 1939, his family had to move back to Prague due to the separation of the Slovakian State and the resultant expulsion of all Czech civil servants. He was interested in studying medicine and matriculated at Charles University. However starting in October 1939, all Czech universities were closed by the German authorities of the so-called Protectorate and as a result he had to postpone his university studies from 1939 to 1945 because of the 2nd World War. Being seriously ill (stomach ulcers) he avoided the "total Einsatz": the forced labour duty his contemporaries had to undertake mostly in the German war industry. He was employed in various unskilled positions and eventually as a worker in a pharmaceutical laboratory. During those years of limited opportunities, he intensively followed his interest in entomology and collected aquatic beetles of the family Dytiscidae, Hydrophilidae and of the genus *Hydraena*. He published several articles dealing with the behavioural strategies (respiration physiology and morphology) of aquatic beetles and their taxonomy. Based on those publications, he was made a Fellow of the British Royal Entomological Society.

In 1945, he decided not to follow his pre-war interest in medical studies and instead studied biology at the Faculty of Science, Charles University. He defended his doctoral



Fig. 1. Jaroslav Hrbáček – in discussion on the shore of the Poltruba backwater in summer, 2005 (photo by Jiří Hotový).

thesis as early as 1948 and was accepted as an assistant professor of hydrobiology in the same faculty. In search of an interesting topic for his future research, he considered repeating, after more than half a century, an introductory study by Prof. A. Frič and his colleagues on the hydrobiology of Czech lakes, fishponds and backwaters. The easily accessible backwaters of the river Labe, northeast of Prague, then became the object of his detailed long-term research and field experiments. He was able to excite the interest of an enthusiastic team of colleagues and students in the problem of declining catches and high productivity of the backwaters. He showed that these backwaters were overstocked with fish, which was contrary to what most fishermen believed. Between 1949 and 1959 he formulated the hypothesis of the effect of fish predation on the species composition and abundance of zooplankton, based on whole ecosystem manipulation: the removal of fish and evaluation of the resulting changes within the system of backwaters and a comparative study of fish ponds in which the numbers of fish were known. The results were fundamental to the theory, formulated later as top-down regulation of freshwater ecosystems. With his team, Hrbáček revitalized the activities of the faculty of the hydrobiology department, as well as of its two field facilities: one a simple cabin close to the River Labe (borrowed from an interested local owner) and the faculty field station near Blatná (SW Bohemia). What is amazing, from a current perspective, is the primitive equipment and relatively low cost, and effectiveness with which they carried out the research, paid partly from Hrbáček's own pocket.

In the late 1950s, the faculty milieu was not too favorable for such long-term and broad-minded research programs and thus Hrbáček took up the opportunity offered to manage a newly organized Hydrobiology Laboratory within the former Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. Again, his team built up a completely new laboratory in Prague and a large field station on Slapy Reservoir (a new water body filled with water in 1955). His team aimed to carry out long-term studies of changes in a series of newly built artificial reservoirs on Czech rivers and creeks (Slapy, Lipno, Hubenov, Orlik and Klíčava reservoirs). For the next two decades, J. Hrbáček also continued his former interest in zooplankton in a series of experiments with the genus *Daphnia*, a dominant grazer within the zooplankton and, together with his wife Marta, published experimental data on the rate of development in relation to temperature and food availability. He also stressed the need to study the taxonomy of the genus and differences in the ecology of individual species. For instance, he contrasted the requirements and life strategies of two local species: *Daphnia pulex* and *Daphnia pulicaria sensu lato*. His other field of interest was the long-term changes in the input of nutrients (N and P) from agriculture into reservoirs and their effects.

His influence on the trends in Czech, and partly Slovak hydrobiology was crucial. Both in the Academy and in the Faculty of Science, Hrbáček's hydrobiology groups became established and his students formulated the details, enlarged or applied his hypotheses in related fields of interest and in water management institutions. What was probably even more important for local scientific activities was that he introduced and taught modern methods in limnology and the most recent ecological ideas. Last but not least, he stressed the importance of hard and tedious long-term field research combined with laboratory and in situ experiments as the only way to successfully present results on the international "science market", rather than research based on the use of sophisticated equipment, which was not available at that time in Czechoslovakia. He published about 150 scientific papers and popular articles for interested amateurs; one of his well known papers (Hrbáček et al. 1961) is cited more than 500 times, including in many handbooks on limnology.

In the late 1970s, politicians decided to move part of the Czechoslovak Academy's biology oriented institutes from Prague to České Budějovice, a regional center in South Bohemia. For the third time, his team had to build up new laboratory facilities and a new field station, on the nearby Římov reservoir. Dr. Hrbáček did not accept the new, politically selected management of the institute and had to retire. Nevertheless, he co-operated with his former colleagues in several

projects and after 1990 was employed as an external expert. In that new situation, J. Hrbáček was interested mainly in general questions of reservoir limnology and published results from long-term sets of data on the prevalence of dominant plankton groups like cladocerans and copepods. He was very active until his final days: his last manuscript was delivered for publication only a few months before his death.

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