

In memory of professor RNDr. Jaroslav Smrž, CSc.

Professor Jaroslav Smrž sadly passed away on 11 August 2018, at the age of 67 years. He belonged to those soil zoologists who were present at the birth of the tradition of the Central European Workshops on Soil Zoology (CEWSZ) in 1992. During the history of the CEWSZ, he participated in most of them as an active speaker and chaired a number of sessions, which he managed in his own distinctive style. As soil acarologist he focussed above all on the feeding and nutritional biology of oribatid mites (Acari, Oribatida), enzymatic activity in their guts, food selection and other aspects related to their functioning in soil food webs, particularly in interactions with soil bacteria and microscopic fungi. For this he used and developed in detail the methods of comparative and functional micronanatomy including the study of gut contents and the free cells in body cavities of mites. Beside this, he was interested in diverse aspects of their ecology, life and survival strategies, and microhabitat selection in oribatid mites, as well as other aspects of their interactions with microorganisms in the soil environment.

Jaroslav Smrž was born on 22 December 1950, in Kladno, Czech Republic. After graduation at the gymnasium there he studied zoology at the Faculty of Science, Charles University in Prague. Although his master's thesis was on aquatic beetles, he subsequently specialized almost exclusively on acarology. In 1974, he was appointed assistant in the Department of Zoology, where he was later promoted to Associate Professor and Professor of Zoology. He was an enthusiastic teacher and lectured on invertebrate zoology, comparative anatomy, acarology and soil biology. Jaroslav Smrž was a very popular teacher, his greatest joy was a lecture room full of students. He was also an active member of the Czech Entomological Society and the Czech Zoological Society, as well as a member of several scientific and university committees.

His lectures at several of the last Workshops were nice overviews of comprehensive topics of mite biology and ecology. His passing away was unexpected and he will be much missed by all participants of the next meetings on soil zoology. Jaroslav Smrž will be remembered not only for his outstanding contributions to soil zoology and ecology, but also for his great enthusiasm and sense of fun.

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Fig. 1. Jaroslav Smrž (on the right) together with František Weyda during the excursion of the 10th Central European Workshop on Soil Zoology to Jindřichův Hradec Castle, April 2009. Photo by Václav Pižl.



Fig. 2. Workshop excursion to the Dívčí kámen Ruin. Jaroslav Smrž (in the middle) giving an informal talk to participants at the 11th Central European Workshop on Soil Zoology, April 2011. Photo by Karel Tajovský.

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