

A century's bug hunting—100 years of the Hungarian Entomological Society

The earliest entomological society was founded in England in 1745, in France in 1832, in Germany in 1837, in Holland in 1854, in Belgium in 1855, in Switzerland in 1858, and in Russia in 1859. Hungary was no laggard in the training and scientific activity of its entomologists, but they had to wait for a society until 1910, for reasons not easy to fathom a century later.

Certainly Hungary's prominent entomologists in the mid-19th century were more often professional collectors and traders than specialists wont to publish scientific papers. In fact Imre Frivaldszky, from 1820 to 1870, was the country's one entomological researcher. One milestone in the development of Hungarian entomology was the establishment in 1870 of the Zoological Department of the National Museum in Pest, which provided a focus and a background for professional entomological research. As the activity accelerated, Ernő Kaufmann began to publish privately in 1883 the journal *Rovarászati Lapok*, but it survived for only one volume. The idea was picked up in 1884 by Géza Horváth, but his *Rovartani Lapok* was also short-lived, lasting only three years, and it is revealing to find that the third volume was edited and published by others: Lajos Biró, Adolf Lendl and Jenő Vángel. Entomology abroad was advancing by leaps and bounds, but it was ten years before Lajos Abafi Aigner and József Jablonowski could revive the journal. One positive effect was that it provided the pool from which the members of the new Hungarian Entomological Society would be drawn.

Hungarian entomological research at the time took two forms: one was professional work by staff of the National Museum and the Royal Hungarian Entomological Station, the other amateur activity by a populous group of devotees. Sadly it was long before a professional arose capable of drawing into a single society these two types of entomologist, with their different interests, qualifications and motives. Presumably the professionals of the period set little store by the collecting activities of the amateurs or the advantages of associating with them. But slowly the time became ripe for doing so.

If events surrounding the foundation of the Hungarian Entomological Society are compared with those around other respected entomological societies, several similarities appear. The Royal Entomological Society, founded in 1833 as the Entomological Society of London, was the successor to a number of short-lived societies dating back to 1745.

The first idea of formally establishing an entomological society in Russia came to entomologists in St Petersburg, where A. K. Mandershtern, an army colonel, and Y. I. Simashko, a specialist member of the Ministry of Education (and renowned author of the Russian Fauna), organized a local entomologists' section. However, the work of organization was impeded by the wave of revolution in Europe in 1848, right up to March 9, 1859, when a group of entomologists meeting in Mandershtern's home elected a constituent committee. The statutes were agreed on December 16, 1859, and K. M. Baer elected as the founding president.

The New York Entomological Society was likewise founded by a group of entomologists and naturalists meeting in the home of Gustav Beyer, a fur manufacturer. There they would admire their host's collection of insects, exchange collecting experiences, and swap and trade specimens. Finally five entomologists formally established the society on June 29, 1892.

May 14, 1910 was the historic day for Hungarian insect studies when the Hungarian Entomological Society was founded. (Initially the *Magyar Entomológiai Társaság*, it changed to being the *Magyar Rovartani Társaság*, when the use of loan words became unfashionable.) Importantly, a group of Budapest entomologists had formed a club in 1890, and although it lacked formal statutes, it met regularly once a week to examine members' collections and exchange and trade specimens. It developed a society structure, electing a chairman, keeping minutes, and issuing certificates. The man responsible for initiating it was an amateur lepidopterist, Nándor Uhrik, who chaired it until he died in 1909. The idea for a formal society, put forward in 1905 by Ernő Csiki, later an eminent coleopterist, was well received, but the preparations took five years. Most of the organization was done by Csiki, backed by the professional esteem of Géza Horváth. The 41 Hungarian entomologists who attended its founding meeting and became its founding members included Horváth as founding president, Csiki as founding secretary and later president, József Jablonowski

and Sándor Mocsáry, later presidents, Kálmán Kertész, Győző Szépligeti, Zoltán Szilády, Ottó Mihók and others. Formal activity began in 1911.

Much energy went into recruitment in the first decade; membership rose above 700, largely because membership fees were the society's only source of income. Of course most of the recruits had little commitment to entomology, so that the society collapsed after the First World War and could only be revived in 1922. Successive economic crises devalued the society's property, which became a victim to speculation. On top of that there were mounting personal antagonisms among the members, which reached a point in 1933 where a split was imminent.

Real renewal could be felt only from 1937. The committee set out to make the society the leading organization of Hungarian entomologists and to offer a framework for bringing professionals and amateurs together. A big contributor to the revival was Endre Dudich, professor of the zoological institute of Péter Pázmány University of Sciences in Budapest, who was able to bring the research at the university and at the museum together, and train a new generation of entomologists who included Zoltán Kaszab, László Móczár, Gyula Fábián and József Szent-Ivány. They were the decisive figures in Hungarian entomology over the following half-century.

Although the society's activity was interrupted again by the Second World War, it managed to reconstitute itself at the end of 1945 and regular lectures resumed in 1946. One decisive factor was the changed relations between professional entomologists and amateurs. The social and economic upheaval of 1948 left it almost impossible for insect specimens to be traded, so that the role of amateurs in collection and faunistic research gained far greater value. The members were brought together by the regular lecture meetings, which provided a forum for exchanging information and allowing talents to develop. It was of fundamental importance that the Natural History Museum placed itself wholly behind the society and provided it with a lecture hall for several decades.

The other stabilizer was the society's journal, which appeared regularly. *Rovartani Lapok* was published privately by Ernő Csiki until 1923, though news relating to the society appeared in it. *Folia Entomologica Hungarica* then appeared from 1923 to 1943, as a journal of the society itself. Only two volumes were published up to 1937, but after that it came out regularly, based on financial support from the Natural History Museum, whose influence helped to improve the standard of the contributions and make it an increasingly respected specialist journal.

Hungary in the communist period played a marked bridging role in communication between the two parts of a divided Europe. The Hungarian Entomological Society was active in promoting information exchange between the entomologists of Western and Eastern Europe, and in arranging interstate research fellowships.

The change of system in 1990 brought notable changes in society, but the aims formulated on the 50th anniversary of the society's foundation remain valid, alongside others in response to present-day conditions. The relations between specialist and amateur entomologists must become closer still to improve the society's cohesion. Great emphasis is needed on ensuring that a younger generation develops and on allowing amateur collectors to expand their collections. More effective work needs to be done on tasks relating to environmental protection and on developing and strengthening environmentally aware behaviour in society.

If that succeeds, the Hungarian Entomological Society will remain a decisive factor in Hungary's entomological activities.

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