



Professor Dr. Jelena Blaženčić On the occasion of her 80th birthday



Professor Dr. Jelena Blaženčić

Jelena Blaženčić (née Stojićević) was born on 24th October 1936 in Belgrade, Serbia. She attended primary school in Kučevo and secondary school in Belgrade, graduating from the Fifth Belgrade Gymnasium in 1955. The same year she began her studies of biology at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Belgrade, from which she graduated in 1959.

She started her teaching and scientific career at the Institute of Botany and Botanical Garden “Jevremovac” of Belgrade University’s Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, having been appointed Teaching Assistant at what was then the Chair of Botany in 1960. She spent her entire professional career at the same institution, formerly the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, now the Faculty of Biology, rising from the position of Teaching Assistant to the rank of Assistant Professor in 1974, Associate Professor in 1980 and Full Professor in 1986.

In 1971, Jelena Blaženčić defended her doctoral thesis entitled “Effects of Certain Ecological Factors on Morphogenesis of Water Chestnut Plant (*Trapa* L.) – an Experimental Study” under the mentorship of Professor Dr. Milorad Janković at the Department of Biology of the

Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Belgrade. Her thesis addressed morpho-anatomical differences of aquatic plant species of the genus *Trapa* grown under various ecological conditions.

After becoming a permanent member of the teaching staff at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, she took part in the practical training of students of plant morphology and anatomy. Later, upon being appointed a lecturer, she continued to further her career through studying other botanical topics and teaching specialised courses (Systematics of Algae, Fungi and Lichens; Aquatic Botany; Algology; Biology of Selected Taxa; Ecology of Hydrobionts) at both the undergraduate and postgraduate study levels.

In addition to her regular responsibilities at her alma mater, she designed and taught the course Systematics of Lower Plants at the Department of Biology of Kragujevac University between 1974 and 1977. As a visiting professor, she taught the course Systematics of Lower Plants with Fundamentals of Microbiology at the Institute of Biology of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Novi Sad during the 1980/81 academic year; and at the Department of Biology of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Priština during the 1982/83 academic year.

From the very beginning of her experimental endeavours, J. Blaženčić was an associate at the Institute for Biological Research “Siniša Stanković” in Belgrade, where she worked in the Department of Physiological and Biochemical Plant Ecology (1961-1985) and Department of Taxonomy (1985-1990). Her participation in and contributions to a number of collaborative projects within the framework of the complex ecological research then conducted at the Institute were particularly valuable.

During the early 1970s, J. Blaženčić sought to establish and equip the Laboratory of Plant Anatomy and Morphology within the Chair of Plant Ecology and Geography in the Institute of Botany and Botanical Garden “Jevremovac”. Thanks to her enthusiasm for botany and the help of younger colleagues, successful practical work with students and research activities in ecological plant anatomy continue in this laboratory to the present day.

In 1988 Professor Blaženčić founded the Chair of Algology, Mycology and Lichenology at the Institute of Botany and Botanical Garden “Jevremovac”. She



Investigations of the aquatic vegetation of the Skadar Lake in early 1970s: J. Blaženčić, professor M.M. Janković and B. Stevanović in the boat surrounded by water lily.

became the first Head of the newly established Chair, where she remained until her retirement, in 2001. With her commitment to work, unwavering attitude towards research and general enthusiasm, she helped improve scientific work at the Chair and succeeded in gathering around common projects young and capable professionals who also continued to share their interests and knowledge with students.

Her dedication to the task of initiating new curricula has left a mark on the organisation of university teaching: she was the originator and co-head of two elective modules, viz., the Hydrobiology module and the module Systematics and Phylogeny of Plants and Fungi, which were introduced on the undergraduate and postgraduate study levels at the Faculty of Biology.

During her long-lasting scientific and teaching career, Professor Blaženčić successfully launched various projects in cooperation with other scientific, academic and economic institutions in the country and abroad. Particularly important was her involvement in joint projects with colleagues from the Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy in Belgrade, the Institute of Biology in Ljubljana, the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Montenegro and the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, as well as departments of national parks all around former Yugoslavia. She participated in a great number of projects financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, doing so in the capacity of a project or sub-project manager or a collaborator. She was also in charge of and/or an associate supporting international projects devoted to the study of aquatic habitats and plants in Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia. She took courses of specialisation during her study visits to Poland and Bulgaria.

Professor Blaženčić supervised numerous university bachelor's and master's theses, either as a mentor to the



J. Blaženčić with her husband, professor Živojin Blaženčić during field research of aquatic plants in glacial lakes of Mt. Durmitor.

candidates or as an examining committee member. She mentored seven PhD candidates and participated in the commissions for review, assessment and defence of 20 PhD theses at the Universities of Belgrade, Novi Sad, Kragujevac, Priština and Skopje. Her professional commitments included organising seminars for high school professors and working with high school students during their annual competitions organised by the Ministry of Education and the Serbian Biological Society.

The bibliography of J. Blaženčić consists of over 200 published authored or co-authored references, including chapters in books and monographic publications, reviews and scientific papers in national and international journals and proceedings and research communications from scientific meetings at home and abroad. There have been over 130 citations of her articles in international journals and scientific publications by researchers from Serbia and the countries of former Yugoslavia. In addition, she has written many articles in popular science publications and magazines aimed at informing a broad audience about new books, expositions or scientific events.

As a dedicated researcher in algology, Jelena Blaženčić was also the founder and editor of the publication *Flora of the Algae of Serbia* (Flora Algi Srbije) and the co-author of two volumes from this work: *Cyanophyta* (1996) and



On the celebration of the Day of the Faculty of Biology in 1995: Dr. R. Radojičić, Vice-Dean of the Faculty, Dr. V. Davidović, Director of the Institute of Physiology and Biochemistry, Dr. B. Čurčić, Director of the Institute of zoology, Dr. J. Blaženčić, Director of Institute of Botany and Botanical Garden „Jevremovac“, Dr. I. Radović, Dean of the Faculty (from left to right).

Rhodophyta (2003). Her experience in teaching and research work, together with an in-depth knowledge of the professional literature, enabled and inspired Professor Blaženčić to write or co-author a number of university textbooks. Being an expert on morphological and anatomical characteristics of vascular plants, she co-authored (with Professors R. Marinović and B. Tatić) the university textbook *Plant Morphology* (Morfologija biljaka) and also wrote the first university manual of its kind *Laboratory Manual of Plant Anatomy with Fundamental Techniques of Microscopy* (Praktikum iz anatomije biljaka sa osnovama mikroskopske tehnike). Later on, with experience gained from her teaching activities, Jelena Blaženčić co-authored (with Professor R. Marinović) the university textbook *Systematics of Algae, Fungi and Lichens - Part I, Algae* (Sistematika algi, gljiva i lišajeva – I deo, Alge) and was by herself the author of the textbook *Systematics of Algae* (Sistematika algi). She also co-authored one secondary school textbook in biology and a contribution to the *Red Book of the Flora of Serbia – Extinct and Critically Endangered Taxa* that included analyses of the status of threat to five species of aquatic plants, viz., *Uticularia intermedia*, *U. minor*, *Elatine triandra*, *Sparganium natans* and *Trapa annosa*.

Professor Blaženčić was not only an enthusiastic teacher and dedicated researcher, but also an active organiser of work at the Institute of Botany and former Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics of Belgrade University, as well as at the university's present-day Faculty of Biology. She was appointed Assistant to the Director of the Department of Biological Sciences within the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics (1977-1979) and Vice-Dean for Teaching and Research at the same faculty (1984-1985). While still a young teaching assistant, she was appointed Secretary of the Institute of Botany (1971-



J. Blaženčić in her office in the Institute of Botany's Chair of Algae, Mycology and Lichenology.

1974). Many years later, in recognition of her dedication to teaching, study and institutional organisation, she was elected Director of the Institute Botany and Botanical Garden „Jevremovac“, in which capacity she served during the period from 1993 to 1997.

In addition to this, she took on a number of social obligations while working in the Department of Biological Sciences (later the Faculty of Biology). Thus, she was President of the University Union, Chairman of the Faculty Council and a member of Belgrade University's Board of Directors. For two-terms she served as a member of the university's Professional Board for Biology.

Moreover, Professor Blaženčić was a member of the Committee for Exploration of the Flora and Vegetation of Serbia of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. She was on the editorial boards of the national scientific journals *Ecology* and *Bulletin of the Institute of Botany and Botanical Garden of the University of Belgrade*, as well as the international editorial board of *Botanica Serbica*. She wrote (and continues to do so) reviews of numerous university textbooks, professional books and scientific papers in renowned scientific journals.

The activities of Professor Jelena Blaženčić are also reflected in her involvement in the work of national and international scientific societies. She was (or is) a member of the Serbian Biological Society, the Serbian Association of Ecologists, the Serbian Biosystematics Association, the International Research Group on Charophytes (IRGC), the Group of European Charophytologists (GEC) [of which she was President for one term (2007-2009)] and the Yugoslav Man and the Biosphere Committee, in addition to which she is an honorary member of the International Association for Danube Research (IAD).

During her long career as a professor and a research scientist, Jelena Blaženčić received numerous awards from various scientific institutions, faculties, professional societies and organisations for her dedicated involvement in their development. In addition, she was awarded



With Dr. Dobrina Temniskova during her visit in Bulgaria.

the Medal of Merit with the Red Star (by decree of the Presidency of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia for her achievements in, and contributions to, development of the country). In January of 2014, she received the Gold Certificate of Achievement in recognition of her active participation in development and affirmation of the Serbian Biological Society and its journal *Archives of Biological Science*.

Special attention should be drawn to the activities of Professor Blaženčić in the creation of a collection of charophytes and vascular aquatic plants brought back from her research and scientific excursions around former Yugoslavia, as well as from France, China and Australia. Today, this collection comprises 2,500 specimens and is an integral part of the herbarium of the Institute of Botany and Botanical Garden "Jevremovac".

Fields of scientific interest

The research activities and scientific interests of Professor J. Blaženčić fall into two time periods. Her early research endeavours pertained to morphological and anatomical study of higher plants. She devoted particular attention to analyses of specific morpho-anatomical features of aquatic plants and their adaptive responses to the available resources of certain aquatic habitats. Those comprehensive studies encompassed analyses of all species of the genus *Trapa* (water chestnut) and also some other aquatic plants (*Myriophyllum* sp., *Ceratophyllum* sp.) from aquatic ecosystems in Serbia and Montenegro. Her exceptional interest in problems of plant anatomy prompted her to prepare, on her own, a very valuable university manual of plant anatomy methods which, since its first edition in 1979, has been reprinted several times and has for decades served as an indispensable reference book for generations of biology students.



European charophytologists meetings: **A** - J. Blaženčić in front of her poster in Montpellier, France, 1989; **B** - J. Blaženčić in front of her poster in Rostock, Germany, 2008.

Along with expanding her teaching activities, Jelena Blaženčić directed her research work and scientific interests towards studying the floristics, taxonomy, chorology and ecology of vascular aquatic plants and algae. In keeping with her background, particular attention was focused on the study of charophytes, a division of freshwater green algae. Remarkably committed, meticulous and tireless, Professor Blaženčić spent years studying aquatic basins (lakes, river banks, canals, ponds, retention ponds) with her closest associates, first and foremost with her late husband, the botanist Professor Živojin Blaženčić, and discovering the unknown world of algae in those habitats. At the present time, after 30 years of investigations, the charophyte flora of the entire territory of former Yugoslavia and a large part of the Balkan Peninsula is known thanks to Jelena's very detailed records of all relevant data from each and every habitat location and her collection of a large number of specimens. The achievements and expertise of Professor Blaženčić have earned her an international reputation and great respect among charophytologists around the world.



J. Blaženčić during her trips to different places in the world: A - Sidney, Australia; B - Gotland, Sweden; C - Lake Titicaca, from Bolivia; D - Gaub river in Namibia.

Special mention should be made of her perseverance in conducting complex phytogeographical and ecological studies of many aquatic habitats, where she established the presence of charophytes and examined their community composition and syntaxonomic position. As a result, information was obtained not only about the algae, but also about all the abiotic and biotic characteristics of the investigated aquatic ecosystems. Professor Blaženčić and her associates spent decades studying mostly mountain lakes (115 of them) all over former Yugoslavia and numerous smaller aquatic habitats such as canals, puddles, caves, marshes, ponds, salt marshes and river banks. With her team she registered 20 charophyte communities for the first time in the examined ecosystems, six of which were new to science. In collaboration with a colleague of hers, Professor Blaženčić published a description of the new species *Chara visiani* J. Blaž. & V. Rand. Furthermore, she and her associates provided the first records of two species of charophytes, *Nitellopsis obtusa* and *Lychnothamnus barbatus*, on territory of the southeastern Balkans. Especially valuable are the data she reported while researching particular regions of the Balkan Peninsula.

Thus, in the course of floristic investigations of aquatic ecosystems of Montenegro, Professor Blaženčić and her associates determined the presence of 21 charophyte species that were then new for that country's flora, out of the 29 taxa now recorded for its territory. Moreover, as a mark of high regard among researchers in algology three new species of diatoms were named after Professor Blaženčić, viz., *Navicula blazenciciae* Z. Lev., *Stauroneis blazenciciae* Z. Lev. and *Prestauroneis blazenciciae* sp. nov.

The entire scientific opus and teaching activities of Professor Jelena Blaženčić are founded on ecological principles, ecological guidelines and an ecological way of thinking. While studying algae and aquatic plants in general, she called attention not only to their ecological characteristics and important function within the ecosystem, but also to the vulnerability of both individual species and their habitats. In addition to this, she carried out analyses of the biomass of aquatic ecosystems, and stressed the role and importance of algae and aquatic plants in wastewater treatment, as well as in the maintenance of favourable conditions in aqua plantations. In fact, Professor Blaženčić was a phytoecologist throughout her



J. Blaženčić with her colleagues, members of the Chair of Algology, Mycology and Lichenology in 2015.

whole professional career – she focused her attention on ecological anatomy in the beginning and then for many years on the ecology of freshwater macrophytes and algae. Unquestionably, long collaboration with her supervisor and teacher, the eminent professor of ecology Milorad M. Jankovic, led to the development of an ecologically informed standpoint in investigations and analysis of the obtained results.

Associates and younger generations remember her as an outstanding individual characterised by perseverance, dedication, willingness to help and teach others, cheerfulness and all-pervading optimism. The spirit of sport left an interminable mark on the personality of Professor Blaženčić, who won numerous medals as a young sportswoman (athlete and gymnast). Despite her age, she even now continues to radiate enthusiasm with her uplifting attitude and uninterrupted involvement in research work and transfer of experience. Her sporting spirit, professional curiosity and undisturbed youthful optimism took her to distant countries of Asia, South America and Africa. Junior and senior colleagues find

that conversations with Professor Jelena Blaženčić are invariably pleasant and never uninteresting.

On behalf of everyone who has worked with Professor Jelena Blaženčić, we wish her good health and long life on the occasion of her 80th birthday and hope that she can continue not only to carry out research work, but also to enjoy sharing the small pleasures of everyday life with her family and friends.

Professor Branka Stevanović

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