Botanica SERBICA

Professor Dr. Vladimir Stevanović, full member of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA) – On the occasion of his 70th birthday

Professor Dr. Vladimir Stevanović.

Vladimir Stevanović was born on 4 December 1947 in Belgrade, where he completed his elementary and secondary education. He studied biology at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, University of Belgrade, from which he graduated in 1972. Already in these student days, a keen interest in field research, particularly in ornithology and botany, prompted him to join various independent student groups in their study projects covering the wider region of Belgrade (the Deliblato Sands, shore areas of the Sava and Danube Rivers, etc.), and this early work earned him his first "professional" award (the University of Belgrade's Award for an Original Student Research Paper). Vladimir Stevanović began his career as a teacher and researcher in 1974 after being appointed a teaching fellow at the Chair of Plant Ecology and Geography, Institute of Botany and Botanical Garden, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, University of Belgrade. He would spend his entire professional career in this institute, rising through the ranks (Assistant Professor in 1986, Associate Professor in 1993, Full Professor in 1999).

In 1984 Stevanović presented his Ph.D. thesis "*The Ecology, Phytocoenology, and Floristic Structure of Mt. Fruška Gora Steppe Vegetation*" at the Department of Biology of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, under the mentorship of Professor Milorad M. Janković. The thesis represented a comprehensive phytocoenological and floristic study of the hitherto poorly explored Fruška Gora steppe vegetation.

During his teaching career at the Faculty of Biology, Professor Stevanović taught the following academic, master, and doctoral study courses: Plant Ecology and Geography, Principles of Ecology, and Vegetation Ecology. He developed and introduced two new courses (Flora and Vegetation of the Balkan Peninsula; and Biodiversity and Conservation) in order to bring the graduate and postgraduate curricula in biology and ecology up to date and enrich them.

In another professorial engagement that ran for almost a decade (2004-2012), Stevanović was in charge of teaching the courses Ecology and Biogeography at the Department of Biology of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Banja Luka. He also lectured as a visiting professor at the Faculties of Geography and Forestry of Belgrade University, as well as at the Department of Biology and Ecology, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Novi Sad.

From 1989 to 2011, Professor Stevanović served as Head of the Department of Plant Ecology and Geography within the Faculty of Biology in Belgrade. His time in office was marked by vigorous renovation and development touching both the scope and methods of botanical research, and the student tutorial programs as well. Significant innovative progress was made in experimental ecology and in applying ground-breaking modern molecular methods to address unresolved taxonomic problems, as well as in developing a complex broad approach to floristic and phytogeographic field research, studying rare and endangered species,

Vladimir Stevanović among the teaching staff of the Institute of Botany and Botanical Garden in Belgrade, together with the eminent Soviet botanist Armen Takhtajan during his visit in 1980.

Investigating plants growing on the screes of Mt. Orjen, Montenegro; early 1980s. Vladimir Stevanović and *Heracleum pyrenaicum* subsp. *orsinii*

and ensuring their protection. This strong drive towards new horizons and innovative techniques of exploration was met with wholehearted approval and acceptance by young and enthusiastic scientists in the Chair, who then channelled the newly acquired knowledge into theoretical and practical tutorials for students. Led by Professor Stevanović, the Belgrade school of geobotany came into being in the process and became recognised even outside Serbia and the Balkan Peninsula. During the same period, Stevanović revived the Belgrade University Herbarium (BEOU) in the Institute of Botany, which now contains over 180,000 registered exsiccates. In addition to this, Professor Stevanović assembled, reviewed, and organised the old herbarium specimens collected by Josif Pančić to form a valuable historical collection, the *Herbarium Pancicianum,* now available to scientific and professional circles. In pursuit of his own professional development, Stevanović took part in different study visit programs and in international botanical excursions in Spain, the Swiss Alps, Greece, Armenia, and Finland.

During his teaching career, Professor Stevanović supervised a number of BSc dissertations, as well as over 40 MSc and Specialisation dissertations, and he mentored or co-mentored more than 45 Ph.D. theses, primarily at Belgrade University's Faculty of Biology, some at that university's Faculty of Forestry and Faculty of Geography, and others at the Universities of Novi Sad and Banja Luka. Many doctoral dissertations elaborated under his mentorship achieved the high standard of scientific monographs.

Vladimir Stevanović participated as a researcher and/or project leader in numerous national and international scientific projects. Among national projects, particularly important were projects involving explorations of Serbia's flora and vegetation, especially those treating significant and rare plants of the central Balkans, and ones related to *The Red Data Book of the Flora of Serbia*, which deals primarily with endangered and vulnerable taxa. Of special interest in his international activities is his participation in the project *Atlas Florae Europaeae - Distribution of Vascular Plants in Europe* (Helsinki, Finland), in which he has been the regional adviser for Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1994; and also his work (since 2010) as a member of the International Committee for Mapping of the Flora of Europe. Outstanding among other significant international projects was the project entitled "*The Flora and Vegetation of the Durmitor National Park*" (SASA, UNESCO, 1990-1998), which was realised under his guidance.

The overall opus of Vladimir Stevanović comprises over 400 published references, including monographic publications and/or chapters published in international and national monographs, peer-reviewed scientific papers, proceedings, reports, studies and expert opinions, and invited and plenary lectures. As the author or a co-author of scientific papers, he has had over 670 citations in international articles, books, and scientific publications by researchers from Serbia and countries of the former Yugoslavia, as well as by scientists from all over the world. He is the editor/co-editor of the books *Biodiversity of Yugoslavia* (Biodiverzitet Jugoslavije), *Red Data Book of the Flora of Serbia 1* (Crvena knjiga flore Srbije 1), and *The Flora of Serbia 2* (Flora Srbije 2). He contributed numerous articles to the books *The Djerdap National Park* (Đerdap, Nacionalni park), *Encyclopaedia: Environment and Sustainable Development* (Enciklopedija Životna sredina i održivi razvoj), and *The Serbian Encyclopaedia* (Srpska

Vladimir Stevanović and M. Niketić analysing the *Ramonda serbica* population in the Radika Canyon in Macedonia (1984).

Botanical excursion in Armenia (1996): Vladimir Stevanović with colleague Kamilla Tamanian in the volcano massif Mt. Aragats, Armenia.

VII OPTIMA Iter Mediterraneum, botanical excursion in Peloponnesus, Greece (1995): Vladimir Stevanović with colleagues Nejc Jogan and Sanja Savić.

Enciklopedija) in its volumes published so far (2010-2013). In *The Serbian Encyclopaedia*, he is the editor for biology, geology, chemistry, and forestry. He is the author of different chapters in the international monographs *Important Plant Areas in Europe: Investing in the Green Gold of South-East Europe, European Red List of Vascular Plants*, and *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*.

During his University career, Vladimir Stevanović served as Secretary of the Institute of Botany, Head of the Chair of Plant Ecology and Geography, and member of the Faculty Biology Council. He was also a member of the University Council of Sciences and Mathematics (the Council of Faculty Groups). He is currently a member of the Biology Committee of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development.

Professor Stevanović was the plenipotentiary head of the Yugoslav expert group for harmonising the text of the Convention on Biodiversity at the UNEP Conference in Nairobi, Kenya (1992). He also took part in the work of an inter-academic symposium held in Stockholm in 2005 that was organised by the Swedish and Serbian Academies of Sciences.

Vladimir Stevanović has been a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA) since 2006 (corresponding member 2006, full member 2012). From 2011 he has chaired the SASA Committee for Flora and Vegetation, which he had already joined as a member in 1993. He is also a member of the SASA Committee for Environmental Protection. From 2015 he has served as Deputy Secretary of the SASA Department of Chemical and Biological Sciences.

Professor Stevanović is the project leader of the SASA project "Chorological and Ecological Factors of Taxonomic Differentiation in the Orophytic Flora of Serbia and Surrounding Areas of the Central Balkans". As a member of various SASA delegations, he spoke in Kishinev (Moldova) in 2007, in Paris in 2007, and in London in 2010. He also spoke at conferences in Alexandria (Egypt) (2010), Budapest (2013), Bucharest (2014), and Ljubljana (2016).

Deliblato Sands, environs of Belgrade, 2004: a botanical field trip with his colleague and friend Kit Tan from the University of Copenhagen.

Vladimir Stevanović in front of a limestone cliff, the sympatric habitat of both Balkan *Ramonda* species (Sićevo Gorge, Eastern Serbia, 2004).

Biology students listening to Vladimir Stevanović lecture during their 2014 research field trip.

Botanical discussion in a botanical milieu: Vladimir Stevanović with his colleague Arne Strid, the prominent Swedish botanist, during his 2008 visit to Serbia.

In 2014 he acted as chairman of the SASA Organising Committee for Celebration of the 200th Anniversary of Josif Pančić's Birth.

Vladimir Stevanović has received awards from the Faculty of Biology, from the organisation of students of Belgrade University, and from their scientific society in recognition of his contribution to the development of science and education. In 2004, he received the Award of the 1st Order from the Ministry of Science and Technological Development for results achieved in a research project.

Professor Stevanović is a member of the editorial boards of the international journals *Phytologia Balcanica* (Bulgaria) and *Botanika Chronika* (Greece), and of journals with international editorial boards - *Botanica Serbica* and *Bulletin of the Natural History Museum in Belgrade*. He was or still is a member of the editorial boards of several national journals: *Nature Conservation, Ecology,* and *Bulletin of the Institute of Botany and Botanical Garden of the University of Belgrade*. Over the course of his career, he reviewed a large number of scientific papers in Serbian and international peer-reviewed scientific journals. In addition to this, he took an active part in the work of international and national scientific societies, for example the Organisation for Phyto-Taxonomic Investigation of the Mediterranean Area (OPTIMA), in which he was a member of the International Commission

Vladimir Stevanović working on determination of collected plant specimens before putting them in the folds of old newspapers and placing them in a plant press for drying (2003).

Vladimir Stevanović with colleagues Gordana Tomović and Snežana Vukojičić, then his PhD candidates, during the 2003 botanical investigation of Mt. Seličevica (Eastern Serbia).

for Floristic Research; the International Association for Ecology (INTECOL); the Serbian Biological Society; the Serbian Biosystematics Society; and the Serbian Ecological Society, which was chaired by Professor Stevanović for a period of time. Moreover, he was a member of both the Yugoslav Man and Biosphere Committee (MAB) and the International Association for Danube Research (IAD). He frequently participated in scientific gatherings in Serbia and abroad as a member of their organising and scientific committees. His international reputation recommended him for organisation of the Fifth Balkan Botanical Congress, held with success in Belgrade in 2009.

Looking to raise awareness of nature and its phenomena among members of the general public, Vladimir Stevanović produced original scripts for 16 episodes aired on Radio Television Belgrade in two series of popular science programmes: *Life Communities* (Životne zajednice) and *Nature of Yugoslavia* (Priroda Jugoslavije). Following the same line, he delivered lectures in popular ecology at the Kolarac University in Belgrade. He addressed many different topics at seminars of the Serbian Biological Society and ones held at the Faculty of Biology within the framework of the Permanent Education Programme for High School and Elementary School Teachers in Serbia.

A scientist's life dedicated to botany of the Balkan Peninsula

Tirelessly studying the flora and vegetation of Serbia and the Balkan Peninsula for over 40 years, Vladimir Stevanović has proved to be a man strongly connected to nature. Driven by endless curiosity, persistent in his endeavour to acquire new knowledge, he approached every new visit to nature, every new scientific challenge, with the same enthusiasm and dedication. He unreservedly followed this path throughout his career, sparing himself no effort even when the assistance of scientists growing and developing by his side was at hand.

Throughout his entire professional career, the hallmark of his work has been a complex botanical approach in every field of interest - be it individual plant taxa, chorology, phytocoenology, or plant conservation. His work stands firmly on field research, gathering of plant material, office work, and review of the available literature, as well as on the exchange of opinions with his associates and experts. But typical of his explorative approach was that all of it had to be seen and analysed within a larger framework, taking into account relationships among plants and their connections with soil, climate, and geography, as well as other factors such as possible historical migrations, adaptations, or settling of plants in ecological niches.

This elaborate and comprehensive approach of Vladimir Stevanović to research gave rise to a synthetic scientific insight that is evident in his papers dealing with the classification, geography, and synecology of vascular plants in Serbia and throughout the Balkan Peninsula. It is also evident in those treating the Balkan serpentine flora; in analysis of new floristic and taxonomic findings discovered in the course of his botanical research in Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia; and in his studies of Serbia's biodiversity and its preservation. Vladimir Stevanović grew in botany, and general botanical knowledge grew with him.

Professor Stevanović's devotion to research and scientific work led to outstanding botanical discoveries - 13 vascular plants, completely new to science: *Draba bertiscea* Stevan. & D. Lakušić 1995; *Minuartia juniperina* subsp. *kosaninii* Stev. & Kamari, 1996; *Draba kuemmerlei* Stevan. & D. Lakušić, 2000; *Pedicularis ernesti-mayeri* Stevan., Niketić & D. Lakušić, 2001; *Draba laconica* Stevan. & Kit Tan, 2003; *Si1ene acaulis* subsp. *vanensis* Özgökçe, Kit Tan & Stevan. 2005; *Heliosperma oliverae* Niketić &

Vladimir Stevanović and his associates together with their local hosts during the 1995 botanical exploration of the Prokletije mountain massif in Montenegro, where they discovered new species later to be named *Pedicularis ernesti-mayeri* and *Heliosperma oliverae.*

Stevan., 2006; *Edraianthus* × *lakusicii* Stevan. & D. Lakušić, 2008; *Helianthemum marmoreum* Stevan., Matevski & Kit Tan, 2009; *Jurinea micevskii* Stevan., Matevski & Kit Tan, 2010; *Petasites anapetrovianus* Kit Tan, Ziel., Vladimir. & Stevan., 2010; *Edraianthus canescens* D. Lakušić, Niketić & Stevan., 2013; and *Onobrychis citrina* Kit Tan, Stevan. & Vold., 2016. Professor Stevanović also described four new infraspecific taxa with the rank of a variety or form, and published new combinations and/or statuses for 19 taxa. Adding to this series, one infraspecific taxon whose specimen was collected for the first time by Vladimir Stevanović was named in his honour, viz., *Cerastium decalvans* f. *stevanovicii* Niketić 2007. The discovery of these plants gives us a more detailed picture of the complex process of florogenesis transpiring on the Balkan Peninsula.

Exploring various aspects of Balkan phytogeography, Vladimir Stevanović brought to light specific chorological and ecological features of high-mountain plants, as well as of the entire endemic flora of the western and central Balkans. As for his studies of the mountain flora, they contributed to the development of a regional phytogeographical characterisation, made possible a more regular zonation of the entire flora of the Balkan Peninsula, and established the boundaries and transitional zones of floristic subregions. They also supported the view that the phytogeographical character of the Balkan Peninsula arose from an interdependent relationship of the arctic-alpine, boreal, and Central European mountain floras. Another significant contribution of these explorations was the putting of floristic elements of endemic vascular plants of the central Balkans and their groupings into several higher phytochoria.

The attention of Professor Stevanović was also attracted to the phytocoenological and ecological diversity of Balkan vegetation. In connection with this, Stevanović primarily studied plant communities whose edificators are forests composed of endemic species of the Balkan flora, such as subalpine Balkan maple forests, mixed white-bark forests, and Macedonian pine forests, but he also investigated chasmophytic communities of alpine regions of the Šar and Prokletije mountain ranges, as well as the salt marsh vegetation of Boka Kotorska (Montenegro).

Vladimir Stevanović has always been particularly drawn to the endemic flora of the Balkan Peninsula. During the past decade, he worked intensively on collecting plant material and assembling data on the distribution of Balkan endemic plants, doing so together with associates and colleagues from Denmark, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Montenegro. So far, 2150 out of an estimated 2700 taxa with the ranks of species and subspecies have been mapped. These floristic

Vladimir Stevanović with all members of the Chair of Plant Ecology and Geography, Botanical Garden "Jevremovac" (Belgrade, 2015).

analyses support the perception of the Balkan Peninsula as being the region of Europe richest in endemic plants, with numerous centres of diversity of these taxa. Particularly interesting in this respect was identification of the centres of genesis, diversity, and differentiation of the serpentine endemic flora, since the areas of serpentine soil in the Balkans are the largest in Europe.

However, the species which take pride of place in Professor Stevanović's scientific opus are the endemo-relics *Ramonda serbica* and *R. nathaliae*, which are living Balkan fossils. For Vladimir Stevanović and his wife, Professor Branka Stevanović, as well as for his closest associates, they were not only a special research challenge, but also the strongest motive nurturing their scientific dedication. Studying chorological, ecophysiological, and synecological traits of species of the genus *Ramonda*, Professor Stevanović and his associates continued a remarkable tradition initiated by the leading figures of Serbian botany - Josif Pančić, Sava Petrović, and Nedeljko Košanin - who devoted an important segment of their scientific opus precisely to these plants. Through dedicated field research with his team, Vladimir Stevanović achieved significant results: new localities of these species were discovered in Serbia and Montenegro, their mixed populations were found in southeast Serbia, and the boundaries separating their areas of distribution were established in Macedonia and Greece. Current investigations of these plants are focused on their molecular phylogeny, genetic differentiation, and genealogy, toward a better understanding of their phylogeography.

As the initiator of conservation biology in Serbia, Vladimir Stevanović presented his experience and knowledge gained through life-long studies of the flora of Serbia and the greater part of the Balkans in papers authored by him and in work as an editor/co-editor of publications which to this day constitute the framework for monitoring and preserving biological diversity in this part of Europe (*Biodiversity of Yugoslavia*, *Red Data Book of the Flora of Serbia 1*, *Important Plant Areas in Central and Eastern Europe*). Even today, Professor Stevanović is working with his team as author and editor of a new edition of the work *Flora of Serbia*, reviewing the entire Serbian flora and now enriched with modern taxonomic, nomenclatural, chorological, and ecological data.

Professor Stevanović has unreservedly conveyed his knowledge and his passion for botanical research to his associates and younger colleagues. His charismatic approach, inspired lectures, and wise advice have encouraged generations of biology students and guided many botanists in choosing their field of research. The

Belgrade school of geobotany has educated new generations of botanists, further developing ecological science and awareness in various scientific institutions in Belgrade, elsewhere in Serbia, and in other scientific centres outside the country. Cooperating with well-known botanists all around Europe, Vladimir Stevanović has established high scientific standards and a critical approach to research and analysis of its results, so that today his opinions are highly appreciated, as are those of his closest associates. All the more so since his unabated enthusiasm keeps him abreast of the latest achievements in botany and natural sciences in general.

Owing to his friendly, spontaneous, and modest personality, he has established and maintained a pleasant and creative atmosphere in which he has worked successfully with his closest associates and collaborators from other corresponding institutions.

In the offices of the Chair of Plant Ecology and Geography, herbaria were studied, opinions exchanged, questions asked and answered, and different issues analysed late into the night, with soothing and inspiring music playing in the background. It was in that productive yet relaxed ambiance bathed in classical music of his choice that Professor Stevanović would give himself up to the pleasure of drawing with precision the type specimens of plants, immaculately and with great delight, revealing to his associates his painting skills – a gift cultivated with great affection in his youth.

To finish this introductory overview, I would like to point out the trait which best defines our professor even today as a person, researcher, and teacher: ever since his early youth, nature has been his life's commitment, unparalleled inspiration, and a source of positive energy. It has taken him on a long journey criss-crossing almost the entire Balkan Peninsula in search of plants, it was the drive behind his efforts to push forward the frontiers of knowledge and understanding, and it enabled him to instil the same passion in his young associates through the spirit of sharing and guidance. For him nature remains the source of ideas, an inspiration for work, and a haven for relaxation, and nowadays he takes time to pursue the passion of his student years: ringing birds and bird watching in the Deliblato Sands, while socialising with friends and young associates.

In times when what is called natural history is becoming neglected and considered obsolete, he takes pleasure in calling himself a naturalist, his own work bearing witness to the advantages which are gained by applying innovative modern methods to traditional practices in the study of nature. His well-founded advocacy of connecting the modern with the traditional comes across in the leading idea of the catalogue he authored for an exhibition dedicated to the memory of Josif Pančić on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of his birth, where Stevanović says: "…Pančić's opus is not behind the times, it is woven into modern science, which keeps building upon it, constantly growing and expanding whenever it stands on solid groundwork".

On behalf of all of us who have had the pleasure and privilege to work with Professor Vladimir Stevanović, I wish him good health and further success in his research and writing, and in the pursuit of his many passions and hobbies; may he also enjoy the simple pleasures of life with his family, friends, and colleagues.

Dr. Marjan Niketić,
Museum Adviser, Principal Research Fellow,
Natural History Museum in Belgrade

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