

PROF. PÉTER BERETZK

1894—1973

PÉTER BERETZK was born in Szeged on 23 October 1894, and for the greater part of his 79 years lived in this town and devoted himself to its service. He was an obstetrician and gynaecologist, who participated enthusiastically in every cultural movement in his town, and whose name is known to practically every inhabitant of Szeged through his frequently appearing and gladly read articles in the newspapers.

He began his university studies in the Faculty of Medicine at Kolozsvár, and continued them in Budapest, where he also obtained his diploma. His first position was in a hospital, but he then entered the medical service of the Hungarian National Railways, where he worked for 43 years. He reached the grade of chief physician, and was awarded several honours.

From the 1930's on he spent virtually all his free time in the open. In the early years he traversed the South Hungarian Plain as a hunter. His attention turned to the hunting area of Lake Fehértó near Szeged, then still in a wild and primitive condition. Together with his hunting companions, he built a small house here, the "hunters' house", the predecessor of the present Fehértó research house. He was a passionate hunter. From week to week he roved over the region of the lake and collected the special birds; he mounted the bulk of these himself, and very beautifully too.

Under the influence of the noted ornithologist, MIKLÓS VASVÁRI, he himself developed into an expert ornithologist. His interest turned increasingly to the study of the regions of occurrence of the individual species and to the research of the phenomena of bird migration. In cooperation with the Hungarian Ornithological Institute, over a number of decades he ringed many thousands of birds, thereby making a significant contribution to the elucidation of the migration routes of bird species breeding in Hungary.

His real area of investigation, however, was the life and environmental relations of birds (acquiring of food, nest building, breeding, training of young, etc.). The results of his observations enriched the Hungarian ornithological literature with many new data. In his papers, some of which he wrote together with his ornithological friend DR. ANDRÁS KEVE, he rectified many oecological and systematic data.

The main significance of his ornithological activity was that in the middle of the 1930's he gave a new impetus to Hungarian ornithological studies. At the beginning of the 1930's, after the appearance of the comprehensive avifaunistic work of JAKAB SCHENK, the view was developing among Hungarian ornithologists that little remained to be done in ornithological research in Hungary. As a result of the observations made by BERETZK with persistent methodicalness at Fehértó, and the publication of these results, this view changed. It turned out that many

species previously considered rare in Hungary were in fact common; late-migrating bird species were generally not breeding species; in the case of certain species the migration began as early as July; etc. Accordingly, there really was much still to do in the research into bird migration. As a consequence of the results obtained by PÉTER BERETZK at Fehértó, systematic ornithological observations were begun in other sodic regions. It can be said that the ornithological research Hungarian sodic waters had commenced.

Although he dealt primarily with the avifauna of the sodic areas, he also studied the birds of the mountain regions and the rivers. For a time he took part in the Bakony research programme. Since its establishment he worked actively in the Tisza Research Working Group and was also a member of its executive committee.

As recognition of his scientific work, Szeged University appointed him as an honorary lecturer in 1948, and as a professor in 1964. He was awarded the degree of Candidate of Science in 1952. The value of his work was recognized by the awarding of a number of honours.

For 6 years he was president of the Szeged Division of the Hungarian Biological Society. In recognition of his merits the Society elected him an honorary member. He was a member of the Agra Zoological Academy, of the South-Finland Nature-Conservancy Association and of the Swiss section of the World Wildlife Fund.

As regards the popularization of science, he was not only an enthusiastic supporter and an effective activist, but also an organizer. For 10 years he was president of the Biological Section in the Csongrád county Organization of the Scientific Educational Association. It was on his initiative that the Ornithological and Nature-Conservancy Study Circle was established within this Association in Szeged, and he was honorary president and an active member of this circle until his death.

Some 300 of his popularizing papers and articles appeared in hunting journals, magazines and daily newspapers. With his writings and his colourful, interesting descriptions of his observations, and with several hundred lectures, he converted a large number of people to the study and protection of birds.

By his activity in nature-conservancy, the name of PÉTER BERETZK became well-known both in Hungary and abroad. He unearthed the secrets of the Fehértó, one of the classical regions from among the Hungarian sodic salt marshlands, and made it famous throughout Europe by the publication of his research results. By his efforts 280 holds (165 hectares) of the Old-Fehértó region (the nesting site of sodic marsh birds) was designated a reservation in 1933. In 1946 a national order increased the area of the reservation to 500 holds. In the course of time, however, with the increase in area of the highly-productive fish farm at Fehértó, and with the introduction of fresh water, there was a radical change in the landscape. The possibility for the sodic marsh birds to nest disappeared.

The main aim in the life of PÉTER BERETZK was research of the Fehértó. For four decades he tirelessly collected the animals of the lake (mainly its birds and butterflies). He set an example to every investigator of nature with his persistence and methodicalness, carrying out observations on the avifauna and making notes in both summer and winter. (His ornithological diary, containing many thousands of observational data, is of extraordinary value.) He loved this region, for which he was the scientific observer on behalf of the National Nature-Conservancy Office. He fought long for the achievement of the protection of Fehértó, and later for the preservation of the nature-conservancy status of the lake. In the final decade of his life the uncertainty as to the protection of the reservation was a bitter disappointment for him. For his outstanding activity in nature-conservancy the Govern-

ment of the Hungarian People's Republic awarded him the gold medal of the Order of Labour.

He worked on the development of Hungarian ornithology not only with enthusiasm, but also with self-denial. He collected very many animals, but retained nothing for himself. Throughout his life he unselfishly supported the Hungarian Ornithological Institute, the Móra Ferenc Museum in Szeged, the József Attila University in Szeged, and the Natural Science Museum in Budapest with his collections. His greatest sacrifice, however, was to present his famous bird collection to the Móra Ferenc Museum. This collection, which consists of some 800 stuffed birds, is of inestimable scientific value, all the more so since, because of the changes in the environmental conditions at Fehértó, the earlier avifauna is today documented only by this bird collection. During the subsequent years he made further additions to this endowment, providing about 400 Fehértó butterflies.

PÉTER BERETZK's ornithological diary, his collected publications and some 2000 of his photographs from Fehértó were presented by his widow to the Móra Ferenc Museum. In this way this valuable collection of scientific data has become available to ornithological research workers in the future.

The memory of DR. PÉTER BERETZK will be reserved not only by his extremely valuable bird collection, his tremendous collection of scientific data and the memorial tablet unveiled in the Szeged Museum, but even more so by his results in the field of Hungarian ornithology in his long and active life, and be the resulting great respect and love.

In memoriam Prof. Péter Beretzk

I. HORVÁTH

Uncle Péter!

This is how I addressed you when you were alive, and this is how I address you now as, with heavy heart, I bid you farewell in the name of József Attila University, the Faculty of Science and the Specialist Biologist Committee of the University, and the Tisza Research Committee and Tisza Research Working Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Throughout your entire life you were an enthusiastic advocate and supporter of nature-conservancy. Time has proved that your views of half a century ago in the interest of nature-conservancy were fundamentally correct and justified: this has now become a scientific activity on a global scale. You are to be thanked for the nature-conservancy area at Fehértó, of which from first to last you were the ardent, tireless researcher and defender. To your name is attached the initiation of synchronous bird studies in Hungary, and it was at Fehértó that the first such observation station was established. At the mention of Fehértó it is your name which immediately comes into the mind of every nature-loving person, not only in Hungary, but abroad as well.

Since your youth the Tisza was one of your loves, and for decades you travelled it and carried out research into it. You were one of the pioneers and founders of the collective research activity which is performed today by the Tisza Research Working Group with the support of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences under the guidance of the Tisza Research Committee. We shall all of us miss your deep knowledge, your comprehensive experience and your kindly, winning personality. There was never a discussion in the Tisza Research Committee where you did not fail to assist in the attainment of our common goal with your suggestions and your

initiatives. With your very last activity too you drew our attention to an area along the Tisza which was worthy of protection.

Your scientific work was recognized by the Scientific Qualifications Committee in 1953 with the award of the degree of Candidate of Biological Science. Your activity was fully worthy of the many state awards too.

You were also a tireless and enthusiastic educator of the young, and this was recognized by our university too when they awarded you the title of university professor.

Uncle Péter!

The final words of farewell are staggering for the biologist too. It is in vain that we know that birth and death are both natural and unavoidable. With death the man as a personality is destroyed, but he continues to live on in his creations. And so will you live on amongst us in your creations and in your realized and propounded thoughts. We shall treasure the memory of your gentle, captivating personality with reverence!

From the publications of

DR. PÉTER BERETZK

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- Die Vogelwelt des Fehérsees bei Szeged. (Kócsag, IX—XI, 1936—38, p. 32—42.)
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- Microtus a. apus* — Swift — breeding in Szeged. (Aquila, LV—LVIII, 1948—51, p. 286—287.)
- Abundance of *Panurus biarmicus ruscicus* BREHM — Bearded titmouse — in the autumn of 1950. (Aquila, LV—LVIII, 1948—51, p. 295.)
- Fatal accident of breeding *Acrocephalus a. arundinaceus* L. — Great Reed-Warbler. (Aquila, LV—LVIII, 1948—51, p. 300.)
- Über das Vorkommen der Brachschwalbe (*Glareola pratincola*) in Ungarn und einigen Nachbarländern. (Larus, VI—VII, 1952—53, p. 192—205.)
- Die Raubseeschwalbe (*Hydroprogne caspia* PALL.) in Ungarn. (Állattani Közl., 1954, XLIV, p. 135—147.)
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