



## Dr. Vladimir Beshkov at 80 years of age

Petar BERON

On May 1st 2015 Vladimir and I camped in front of the cave Svinskata Dupka near the Lakatnik railway station. The idea was to celebrate the visit of this cave 60 years earlier – my first cave. Beshkov, who introduced me to caves, had already visited the karst of Lakatnik and Karlukovo, and, more importantly, knew Petar Tranteev, who was for many years our guide and teacher in the dark world of caves.

For all these years I was working in permanent collaboration with one of the most learned and remarkable Bulgarian zoologists. There were no computers, internet, xeroxes, even typewriters were a problem. To exchange knowledge and ideas with people like “Beshkata” was important and often one idea has been developed into another – for publications, expeditions and simple humane ties.

Vladimir Anastasov Beshkov was born in Sofia on 10.09.1935, in the family of the prominent Bulgarian geographer Prof. Anastas Beshkov, Member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. His childhood was spent in Svishtov, where his father was professor in geography. Vladimir graduated in the Faculty of Biology, Geology and Geography of the University of Sofia in 1959 and was appointed to the Institute of Zoology of BAS, where he retired in 1995. Besides his main field – Herpetology – Beshkov was very interested in exploring caves and we visited together many of them (and discovered some). Since 1958 we were among the first to make rope ladders for descending pot holes, we were exploring new caves with very limited resources while there were no caving clubs or federation.

We started also the first post-war bat ringing and Vladimir remained interested in bats ever since and wrote some papers on them.

The main field of interest of V. Beshkov (Doctor since 1979) remained the reptiles and amphibians. He is now the dean of Bulgarian herpetologists and still helps the younger colleagues in their work. As early as in 1964 we published with him a Catalogue and Bibliography of Bulgarian herpetofauna – the third phase of research on these animals, after Kovatchev and Buresch and Tzonkov. Beshkov’s work and personality was highly appreciated by Acad. Dr. Buresch, who published with him an interesting article on *Vipera aspis*. So far Beshkov has written 83 scientific papers, including two books, on the taxonomy, ecology, biology and distribution of Bulgarian amphibians and reptiles and on bats.

Particularly important are his actions for understanding the biology of the snakes in Maleshevska planina (SW Bulgaria), where two thirds of the snake species in Bulgaria live. He greatly contributed with studying the biology of a set of little explored species in this region. Another phenomenon, discovered by V. Beshkov, was the vertical, directional breeding migration of *Rana temporaria* in the lowland near Botevgrad, one of the longest worldwide that could be up to 10 km. This research, carefully carried out for a long time, is of universal importance for the better understanding of the biology of this mountain frog. His efforts are being rewarded with the established protected area the marsh “Muchalnitsa” that is first and the single protected area specially dedicated for amphibian species. Beshkov’s research on *Rana graeca* is fundamental for the knowledge of the biology of this little known species. He greatly contributed to herpetospe-

cies faunistics, driving the main framework of their distributional pattern. Beshkov is working for the protection of tortoises and other amphibians and reptiles in Bulgaria and achieved legal results in this field. He started a conservation campaign for the administrative protection of the tortoises' species in the late seventies. Among the main contribution of Beshkov are the amphibians and reptiles texts in the first and the second editions of the national red data book. Another contribution of Beshkov is his activity as consultant of many films about the nature, having received high international awards.

Beshkov was (and remains) interested in traveling to the wonders of the world. Since 1971 it became easier to travel abroad and we started our expeditions first to neighbouring Greece and Turkey, to Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and later to far away countries. These travels were difficult, but we were young and everything seemed amazing. Traveling on his motorcycle with side-car, with very little (mostly our own) money, spending the night on the open, we were happy nevertheless. We were (and still are) very interested in monuments, temples, museums, and during the two month tour of the Near East with our friend Tanyu Michev in 1972 we saw a lot – Palmira, Baalbek, Persepolis, Capadokia, mountains like Erjias, Suphan and Elburs, caves and interesting people. Later, with the same motorcycle, we visited some Greek islands, Crete and discovered the unusual cave fauna of Santorini. Many new species have been collected and described as a result of these travels.

A memorable travel was the one in East Africa in 1983. After two months in Mozambique, we visited Zimbabwe, Zambia and Tanzania, including Zanzibar, climbed Kilimanjaro and saw many exotic things. Beshkov is fond of mountains and, besides the high summits where we have been together (Erdjias, Suphan, Demavend, Kilimanjaro, Ruwenzori, Kerinci, Rinjani, Greek and Bulgarian mountains),

he reached the tops of some others (Ararat, Kazbeg, Elbrus).

In 1994 we traveled in Indonesia and visited Sumatra, Java, Nias, Bali, Nusa Penida, Lombok, Sumba, Sumbawa, Komodo, Flores and Timor. For a herpetologist to see the dragons of Komodo was a life-time experience. Meanwhile Beshkov visited the United States, invited by his partner Prof. Jameson.

We traveled again in East Africa (Kenya and Uganda) in 1993, climbing the summit Ruwenzori and visiting Elgon and some other places in these countries.

Beshkov knows in details Bulgaria, even the smallest villages and hills. With his remarkable memory, inherited from his father, he often helps zoogeographers and makers of atlases of different Bulgarian animals. Vladimir Beshkov remains involved in the protection of nature and made many expert assessments for different projects. With his typical honesty and firmness his assessments are accurate and reflect the real situation in the explored areas.

The activity of Beshkov in protecting the tortoises, the habitats of the Alpine newt, the important breeding pond of *Rana temporaria* near Botevgrad and others contributed to enhancing of public awareness what concerns the amphibians and reptiles.

Beshkov often collects invertebrates in caves and was honoured by specialists who named after him one new genus of cave beetles (*Beskovia*) and 12 species and subspecies of animals (Nematoda, Isopoda, Chilopoda, Diplopoda, Araneae, Acari, Coleoptera, and Amphibia) from Bulgaria, Greece, Indonesia (Sumatra) and Uganda.

For me one of the most important contributions of Vladimir Beshkov to zoology is his son Stoyan, Lepidopterist and fighter for the preserving of Bulgarian nature.

## Publications of Dr Vladimir Beshkov (Beškov, Bechkov, Beschkov)

### Scientific Publications

#### Herpetological Papers

- [BESHKOV V.] Бешков В. 1959. [A new snake for the fauna of Bulgaria]. – *Priroda*, **1**: 89. (In Bulgarian).
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### Taxa honouring Dr Vladimir Beshkov

To Vladimir Beshkov are dedicated one genus (*Beskovia*) and 12 species and subspecies of animals, described by specialists from Bulgaria, France, Germany and Russia. They originate from Bulgaria, Greece, Uganda and Indonesia (Sumatra).

#### Nematoda

Fam. Filariidae

*Litomosa beshkovi* Jančev, 1971

Comptes rendus de l'Académie bulgare des Sciences

Bulgaria, parasite

#### Crustacea

##### Isopoda Oniscidea

Fam. Trichoniscidae

*Trichoniscus beshkovi* Andreev, 1986

Biologia Gallo-Hellenica, **11**(2): 158

Greece, cave

#### Arachnida

##### Opiliones

Fam. Sironidae

*Siro beshkovi* Mitov, 1994

Spixiana, **17**(3): 275

(Now *Cyphophthalmus beshkovi*)

Bulgaria, cave

#### Araneae

Fam. Linyphiidae

*Lepthyphantes beshkovi* Deltšev, 1979

Acta zoologica bulgarica, **13**: 60

Crete, cave

Fam. Nesticidae

*Nesticus beshkovi* Deltšev, 1979

Acta zoologica bulgarica, **13**: 54

Crete, cave

#### Acari

##### Acariformes

Fam. Ophiotidae

*Ophiotes beshkovi* Beron, 1974

C.R. de l'Acad. bulg. des Sciences, **27**(5): 691

Bulgaria

#### Myriapoda

#### Chilopoda

*Lithobius beshkovi* Matic et Golemansky, 1967

Bull. Inst. Zool. Mus., Sofia, **24**: 127

(Now *Lithobius* (*L.*) *rushovens* Matic, 1967)

Bulgaria, cave

#### Diplopoda

Fam. Trichopolydesmidae

*Sphaeroparia beshkovi* Mauriès et Heymer, 1996

Bull. Mus. nat. Hist. nat. Paris, **18**, Sect.A (1-2):

Uganda

Fam. Paradoxosomatidae

*Tectoporus beshkovi* Golovatch, 1996

Arthropoda Selecta, **5**(3- 4): 139

Sumatra

Fam. Schizopetalidae

*Balkanopetalum beshkovi* Strasser, 1973

Ann. Zool., Warszawa, **30**(15): 427

Bulgaria, cave

#### Insecta

##### Coleoptera

###### Fam. Carabidae

*Duvalius beshkovi* Coiffait, 1970

Ann. de Spéléologie, Toulouse, **25**(3): 721

Bulgaria, cave

###### Fam. Leiodidae

*Beskovia* V. Guéorguiev, 1960

C. R. Acad. bulg. Sci., Sofia, **13**(6): 723

Bulgaria, cave

#### Vertebrata

##### Amphibia Caudata

Fam. Salamandridae

*Salamandra salamandra beshkovi* Obst, 1981

Faunist. Abh. Staatl. Mus. Tierkunde in Dresden

Bulgaria

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Author's address

Petar Beron, National Museum of Natural History – BAS, Tsar Osvoboditel Blvd. 1, 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria

## Доц. д-р Владимир Бешков на 80 години

Петър БЕРОН

(Резюме)

Статията е посветена на 80-годишнината от рождението на видния български зоолог д-р Владимир Бешков, изследовател на пещерите, прилепите, земноводните и влечугите. Д-р Бешков е автор на 83 научни и на множество популярни статии за пещери, животни, защита на природата и паметници на културата. Забележителни негови постижения са подробното изследване на змиите в Малешевската планина, откриването и изследването на уникалната миграция на планинската жаба в Ботевградско, защитата на костенурките и на други земноводни и влечуги и много други.

На името на д-р Владимир Бешков са наречени един род (*Beskovia*) и 12 вида и подвида животни от България, Гърция, Уганда и Индонезия (Суматра) от специалисти от България, Франция, Германия и Русия.