

Mgr. Oldřich Potůček - 65 years



Mgr. O. Potůček was born on November 30, 1929, in Hradec Králové (Czech Republic) in a family with commercial and artisan's traditions and inclination to art. Nature attracted him since his childhood and the first plant which captivated him already in his pre-school age was *Lysimachia nummularia*. Besides love of reading he was interested in nature and hiking and entered scouts' movement in his primary school years.

His work in this movement continued (with the pause in war years) up to its abolition at the end of 40-s. After having finished primary school he entered classical grammar school in Hradec Králové where chemistry and botany were subjects of his interest. Together with his parents he travelled through the Náchod district and here, as well as in Novohrad forests, intensified his love of nature. In parks, wood species phenology attracted his mind a bit and in Náchod region his later favourites - orchids started to engross his interests.

After school-leaving examinations he went on Charles University, Faculty of Science in Prague with the intention to study organic chemistry, but in 2nd form changed to botany. After communist coup d'état in 1948 his family was in displeasure with the regime (father was former legionnaire, friend of M. R. Štefánik, general and co-founder of the 1st Czechoslovak Republic) and, therefore, in 1951 he had to stop his studies and join auxiliary technical battalion for 26 months. After having finished his military service he was allowed to return back to the Faculty thanks to University botanists Fott and Skalický. He studies geobotany and plant systematics at the Department of Botany and works as an external assistant of Doc. Jirásek at the Department of Utility Plants. Mgr. Potůček finished his University studies in 1956 with the intention to work as a research assistant in the University Botanical Garden. But since he was not member of Communist party he wasn't given a School Ministry consent and started to work on the basis of billet at the Breeding Station in Sládkovičovo - Nový Dvůr (Slovakia). He went on working there for entire 38 years - beginning as a research assistant and ending as an independent research worker. In 1958 he tried to start with his Ph.D. these, but - for political reasons - didn't succeed. Certain satisfaction came no sooner than in November 1989 and so in 1991 Slovensko enterprise in Bratislava apologises to him in public, Charles University in Prague awarded him academic title magister (Mgr.), he is de iure and extra iure rehabilitated

and in 1990 he was co-opted to the National Committee Council in Pusté Úľany (Galanta district) to represent the Green Party.

During his stay in Sládkovičovo he passed through the study of genetics and plant breeding at Agricultural University in Nitra which was finished in 1971. At the Station his forces were devoted to breeding of many crops, especially sunflower and millet and testing of herbicides. He worked in trade-union movement and was a head of professional library. In 1975 his millet cultivar UNIKUM was approved and, as a phytopathologist, he participated in vernal barley breeding. His activities in trade-union movement and in breeding were many times appraised.

Mgr. Potůček devoted his spare time to floristics in Galanta district (south-western Slovakia), nature protection (in 1962 he became voluntary reporter of State Nature Protection) and considerably contributed to activities of Slovak Union of Nature and Landscape Protection in Galanta district. This activity was also much appreciated and he was awarded many domestic and foreign prizes. Also gardening belongs to his interests - he worked in several functions in gardener's organizations. Finally, for 10 years he worked in Socialist Academy.

In the field of botany after initial phase of wide interests (also in weeds, among others), study of orchids becomes his strong, definitely formed sphere of interests. He gave his herbarium from Náchod district to the Department of Botany, Charles University in Prague long time ago and his herbarium from the period of military service was confiscated on his departure. Today he possesses 500 herbarium specimens from Galanta district.

Mgr. Potůček has been married since 1960 and has two daughters, both married, graduated from Chemistry Technical College and Textiles Technical University in Liberec. In 1984 he got over colon cancer and radioactive irradiation consequences feels up to now. In his life he visited Western countries only twice (state security forbade him the other journeys as undesired) but was allowed (especially on his own expenses) to attend orchid conferences in former GDR (2x FRG) and travelled to Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Germany on business.

With regard to the fact that, maybe, he acquired genes for long-living (from mother's side - one of his ancestors survived 114 years!), believes that, undisturbed he will be able to devote long time to research of his favourites - orchids, which form the main part of his botanical contribution up to now in his life (besides his breeding works in applied botany). As it is obvious from the bibliography below, much attention was paid to the genera *Dactylorhiza*, *Epipactis*, orchid hybrids. Mgr. Potůček wrote (in some cases as a co-author) several identification keys to the Czechoslovak orchid species, found a number of new orchid taxa, especially hybrids (e.g. *Himantoglossum caprinum*, *Epipactis x graberi*, *Dactylorhiza x genevensis*) for the territory of Czechoslovakia and also described several of them (*Dactylorhiza x aschersoniana* nothosubsp. *wisniewskii* nothomorph *zohorensis*, *D. x braunii* nothomorph *monticola*, *D. x templinensis*, *D. x oravica*, *x Dactyleucorchis nieschalkii* nothomorph *minor*). His interest in hybrids reflects clearly his education in genetics obtained at the Breeding Station.

Mgr. Potůček is modest and friendly man, who is willing to help unselfishly everyone interested in orchids. He is excellent narrator and has beautiful memory which would allow him to write memoirs reflecting lives of several Czech and Slovak botanists

during his life. Such piece of work is missing and would be much appreciated by botany historians nowadays and in future. In the name of all of Czech and Slovak orchideologists (but, I could put Czechoslovak here, since Mgr. Potůček remained convinced federalist even after the senseless Czech and Slovak partition) I would like to wish him good health and many new discoveries in the next years. Hopefully, he will be able to realize the things the communist regime in his country deprived him of and devote himself fully to his botanical interests - *Orchidaceae* family studies.

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(translated by L.Mihoková)

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Mgr. Potůček is also author of 16 reviews and opponent judgements; several short manuscripts on breeding of spring barley, sunflower, millet and tomatoe and another manuscripts on morphology, floristics and distribution of orchids.

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