



Ilya Sergeevich Darevsky

(1924 –2009)

Professor Ilya S. Darevsky passed away on the 8th August 2009 at age of 85. He was a great Russian zoologist-herpetologist and a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Ilya S. Darevsky was born on the 18th December 1924 in Kiev. He was interested in amphibians and reptilians since his childhood, when he met Serguis A. Chernov, a herpetologist from Leningrad (now St. Petersburg). During the Great Patriotic War (World War II), he was wounded twice and was decorated with the Red Star and Great Patriotic War of the 1st degree. After the War, Ilya S. Darevsky was recruited to join the Biology Faculty of the Moscow State University, where he graduated in 1953. From 1954 to 1962, Ilya S. Darevsky worked in Armenia, firstly as a PhD student, then as a Junior Scientist, Scientific Secretary and Head of the Department of Zoological Institute, Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences. In 1958, he defended his Candidate thesis on reptiles of Armenia and their zoogeography (under the supervision of Dr. Sergius A. Chernov). Later on, studies of the Caucasian herpetofauna, and the rock lizards in particular, made him a world-renowned scientist. In 1962 Ilya S. Darevsky became a junior researcher at the Zoological Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences; in 1967 he brilliantly defended his Doctor thesis (second scientific degree in Russia) “The Rock Lizards of the Caucasus”, and in 1976 became the Head of Laboratory of Ornithology and Herpetology, which he led for the next 20 years. Ilya S. Darevsky made many great discoveries in evolutionary biology. He was the first to discover parthenogenesis and polyploidy in “higher” vertebrates and showed their importance for speciation. These discoveries inspired an explosion of similar investigations across many taxa and made Ilya S. Darevsky a world authority on the evolutionary importance of parthenogenesis and polyploidy in vertebrates.

Ilya S. Darevsky authored more than 300 scientific papers, including several monographs about the systematics, ecology, paleontology, morphology and conservation of amphibians and reptiles. He has also been part of many zoological expeditions to the Caucasus, Central Asia, Indonesia (Komodo) and Vietnam.

Ilya S. Darevsky trained many scientists from Commonwealth of Independent States, Mongolia and Vietnam, and for many years he lectured on herpetology at Leningrad State University. For the training of next generation foreign scientists, he was awarded the “People’s Friendship” medal (1982) by the government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and “Friendship” medal (2000) by the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. In 1985, he was given the honorary title of “Honoured Scientist of the RSFSR” and in 1987 he became a laureate of Mechnikov’s award.

Ilya S. Darevsky was President of Russian Herpetological Society (1989-2006), honorary member of the Societas Europaea Herpetologia (since 1996) and American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists (since 1973) and member of many Russian and foreign scientific societies.

Many species of amphibians and reptiles were named in honor of Ilya S. Darevsky. The Caucasian rock lizards, that Ilya S. Darevsky studied for his entire life, were named in his honor as a genus *Darevskia*.

Being head of the Laboratory of Ornithology and Herpetology he brought a very democratic style of administration, that created a unique atmosphere of creative freedom. He was always friendly and eager in meeting young colleagues. Ilya S. Darevsky never refused anybody and always offered his assistance.

During his last ten years Ilya S. Darevsky was a leader of the St. Petersburg herpetological school, which was supported by many grants.

However, he became seriously ill over the last few years and was unable to visit the Zoological Institute. Nonetheless, he was continuously interested in the life of his

colleagues and was upset that he could not work any more. But as he said before his death: “I did a lot and now I should have some rest”.

Ilya S. Darevsky, was a superb scientist who contributed greatly to the fields of evolutionary biology and herpetology and will be remembered forever as a good friend and colleague to those who had the privilege of knowing him.