

PROFESSOR GHEORGHE G. POPESCU, PhD.
– COMMUNION IN BOTANY (1939-2017)

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Professor Gheorghe G. Popescu, PhD. (1939-2017)

Abstract. In the research activity in the botanical field, we have the chance to be friends and to collaborate with Professor Gheorghe G. Popescu PhD. Born on the 28th of November 1939, he attended the university studies at the Faculty of Biology, University of Bucharest (graduated in 1962). He is native from a wonderful region, from Păusești-Otasau site, located on the Otăsău river, tributary of the Bistrița river (Vâlcea county), from an area rich in flora and fauna, with numerous historical monuments and significant culture. The PhD thesis was inspired by his native sites: *The floristic and geobotanical studies in the hydrographic basin of the Vâlcea Bistrița River (Vâlcea, 1974)*. Since the graduation of the university studies until his retirement, Professor Gheorghe G. Popescu PhD performed his professional and scientific activity, at the same subject, at the same University (Biology, Botany, University of Craiova, achieving all the didactic positions, from teaching assistant to full professor). He greatly contributed to the improvement of the Botany matter base from the University of Craiova, with herbarium collections and microscopic preparations, with plants collected by himself. Altruist and full of initiative, he also contributed to the development of Botany at Craiova and of the research in this field.

The didactic and research activity was highly appreciated by the management staff of the University of Craiova; thus, he was coordinator and Director of Professor Dr. Doc. Alexandru Buia Botanical Garden from Craiova and decisively contributed to the establishment of the other unit, namely the Prof. Dr. Doc. Marin Păun Alpine Botanical Garden from Râncea (Gorj County). He edited many monographic studies in the botanical field, organized scientific international symposia, published numerous papers and formed valuable scientific staff. He was a member in many scientific societies, such as Biological Science Society, Vice-President, Romanian Phytocoenological Society, International Federation of Phytocoenology (Bailleu, France). He conducted research studies in different botanical fields, such as: systematic botany, morphology and plant anatomy, phytocoenology, phytosociology, etc. He decisively contributed to the achievement of many theses of pre-university professors for obtaining the first didactic degree. He also monitored the research and didactic activity in the field of Botany at the University of Craiova. Thus, the colleagues formed under the guidance of Professor Gheorghe G. Popescu, from teaching assistant to associate professors, must continue and develop the didactic and research activity in Botany Field, at the University of Craiova.

Keywords: professional development, didactic and scientific activity, commemoration.

Rezumat. Profesor dr. Gheorghe G. Popescu – comuniune în botanică (1939-2017). Am avut șansa să fim prieteni și colaboratori ai Profesorului dr. Gheorghe G. Popescu în activitatea de cercetare. Născut la 28 Noiembrie 1939, el a urmat studiile Universității București, Facultatea de Biologie (licențiat în 1962). A fost originar dintr-o regiune frumoasă, bogată în floră și faună, cu numeroase monumente istorice și culturale, satul Păușești-Otăsău (județul Vâlcea), așezat pe râul Otăsău, afluent al râului Bistrița. Teza sa de doctorat a fost inspirată de locurile natale: *Studii floristice și geobotanice în bazinul hidrografic al râului Bistrița (Vâlcea, 1974)*. De la absolvirea facultății și până la pensionare Prof. dr. Gheorghe G. Popescu și-a desfășurat activitatea didactică și de cercetare la aceeași universitate (Universitatea din Craiova, Disciplina Botanică, parcurgând toate gradele didactice de la asistent la profesor universitar). El a contribuit la dezvoltarea bazei materiale a Disciplinei de Botanică, a colecției de herbar și preparate microscopice, cu material colectat de el. Altruist și plin de inițiativă a deschis direcții de cercetare noi în botanică, contribuind astfel la dezvoltarea disciplinei. Activitatea sa didactică și de cercetare a fost apreciată de conducerea universității, fiind numit Director al Grădinii Botanice Profesor Dr. Doc. Alexandru Buia din Craiova și contribuind decisiv la înființarea Grădinii Botanice Alpine Prof. Dr. Doc. Marin Păun, Râncea (județul Gorj). A editat numeroase studii monografice în domeniul botanicii, a organizat simpozioane științifice internaționale, a publicat numeroase lucrări științifice și a format tinere cadre didactice. A fost membru în societăți științifice: Societatea de Științe Biologice (vicepreședinte), Societatea Română de Fitocenologie, Societatea Internațională de Fitocenologie (Bailleu, Franța). A coordonat activitatea de cercetare în diferite ramuri ale botanicii: botanica sistematică, morfologia și anatomia plantelor, fitocenologie, fitosociologie, ș.a. A coordonat numeroase lucrări de grad ale profesorilor din învățământul preuniversitar. Cadrele didactice formate sub coordonarea prof. dr. Gheorghe G. Popescu au datorat să continue și să dezvolte activitatea didactică și de cercetare începând de acesta la Universitatea din Craiova.

Cuvinte cheie: dezvoltare profesională, activitate didactică și științifică, comemorare.

Professional development.

I had the chance to be friend and collaborate with Professor Gheorghe G. Popescu, PhD, from the University of Craiova. He was born on the 28th of November 1939, in the commune Păușești-Otăsău, Vâlcea, a settlement located on both banks of the Otasau River, rich in history and traditions, flora and fauna. He graduated the Faculty of Biology of the University of Bucharest (1962), in a promotion marked by graduates who honoured the education and research in

Romania: Prof. Andrei Marin PhD, Prof. Anghel Ion PhD, S.R. I. Brezeanu Aurelia PhD, S. R. I. Săvulescu Anastasia PhD, Prof. Toma Nicolae PhD, Prof. Popescu G. Gheorghe PhD, Prof. Simeanu Vasile PhD, Prof. Olimid Virgil PhD (the last three professors at the University of Craiova), etc.

After graduation, he worked as a biology professor at Olănești-Bai High School (Vâlcea County), being, at the same time, head of laboratory and teaching assistant at the Agronomic Institute from Craiova, Botany Department. The university career was carried out in a single university center (1964-2009, Craiova), achieving successively all the positions in higher education, at the same subject (Botany) and department (Biology-Botany). His organizational talent and work capacity, his altruistic character, dedication and very good cooperation with the people whose activity he guided and coordinated, resulted from the activities he carried out and his achievements.

The Botanical Garden from Craiova and the Alpine Botanical Garden from Râncea, Gorj.

Besides the activity in his field (Botany) and at the department, he was also coordinator of the Botanical Garden from Craiova (1992-1996) and Director of this prestigious scientific unit (from 1996 until his retirement). Involved in this activity, he brought plants from his field trips in the backpack, thus enriching the vegetation fund from the Botanical Garden of the University of Craiova, which is currently named after the illustrious botanist who founded it, **Professor Dr. Doc. Alexandru Buia Botanical Garden**.

Along with Prof. Docent Marin Păun PhD, he founded **Prof. Dr. Doc. Marin Păun Alpine Botanical Garden** from Râncea (Parâng Mountains). It should be mentioned that the University of Craiova is the only University in Romania and one of the few Universities in Europe, which has two Botanical Gardens, with distinct themes. Both Botanical Gardens represent a solid educational base that contributes to the formation of competent specialists in this field. Professor Gheorghe G. Popescu was highly appreciated by the colleagues from other Biology and Botany departments and coordinators of other Botanical Gardens in Romania and abroad, for his organizational talent, dedication, work and accomplishments. Thanks to his activity and results, in the period 1992-1996, he was the scientific secretary of the Horticulture Faculty from the University of Craiova (faculty with three departments: Horticulture, Biology and Technology of Agricultural Products Processing). The 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Botanical Garden of the University of Craiova was marked by the organization of a special scientific session, publication of reference volumes with papers of numerous specialists from Romania and other countries. The exchange of opinions, presentations of scientific papers and research projects were of great importance to all participants.

Affiliation to Professional and Scientific Societies.

Professionally, Professor Gheorghe G. Popescu was **Vice-president** of the **Romanian Society of Biological Sciences (B.S.S.)** and **President of Craiova Branch of S.S.B.** – an organization for higher education teachers and researchers from the University of Craiova, pre-university teachers from the five counties of Oltenia (Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt and Vâlcea), Biology-Botany researchers from Oltenia Research Units (curators from the Oltenia Museum in Craiova, ROMSILVA research staff), and all those interested in the field. Research of general or systematic botany was used in phytocoenological and phytosociological studies. Thanks to these studies, Professor Gheorghe G. Popescu was a member of the **Romanian Society of Phytosociology** (Headquarter at the Botanical Garden in Cluj-Napoca) and a member of the **International Federation of Phytosociology**, Bailleud (France), since 1972.

Elaborated and published monographs and treatises. Scientific papers. To disseminate the results of the carried out scientific research, Professor Gheorghe G. Popescu PhD published volumes that enriched the Romanian literature in the field. Among them we mention: *The meadows in the sub-Carpathian area of Oltenia*. University of Craiova, 1973; *Botany*, University of Craiova, 1980; *Plant Morphology and Anatomy*. University of Craiova, 1980; *Systematic Botany*. Vol. II Cormobionta, University of Craiova, 1995; *Practical Guide, Part I: Plant Morphology and Anatomy*, University of Craiova, 1998; *Botany*, University of Craiova, 2000; *Introduction to Botany, Phylogenetics*. Sitech Publishing House, Craiova, 2009, etc. This last volume, written and published by our colleague, Prof. Gheorghe G. Popescu, is a reference volume for the Romanian literature in the field, which honours it. He also edited monographic volumes dedicated to the two Botanical Gardens (from Craiova and Râncea, etc.).

Participation in scientific manifestations and publication of research papers abroad. Prof. Gheorghe G. Popescu PhD participated in numerous scientific events with papers that were published in the volumes of the respective events or with papers involving the use of new criteria for the assessment of scientific research. Among the studies approached and achieved through our collaboration, there can be mentioned.

A. Papers presented at scientific events organized abroad.

A.1. Tercentenary of Berlin-Dahlem Botanical Garden, September 9-13, 1979. There were presented two scientific papers. One of the papers, presented as a poster, was distributed to the participants in the Congress (Corneanu G.G. & Popescu G. G. 1979 - *Chorologic and taxonomic studies on *Fritillaria L. in Romania**). The second paper (Corneanu G. C. & Popescu G.G. 1982 – *Distributional and anatomical studies on *Fritillaria L. in Romania**) was published in the volume with the support of OPTIMA Scientific Society (*Wildenowia* Berlin-West, **11** (2): 307-315). We have to mention that the presence of the genus *Fritillaria* in Romania was presented in the paper ‘Botanical Research in Stan Forest (Farcas commune, Dolj Couty) / Cercetări botanice în pădurea Stanului (comuna Farcas, județul Dolj)’, Ziridawa, 1987, **17**: 79-81 (authors G.G. Popescu, G.C. Corneanu, C. Tomoiu), its presence being discovered by Constantin Tomoiu, a promotion colleague and teacher in his native village, Melinesti. The discovery in the field of the two species of *Fritillaria* took place in the first week after Easter in 1987 and it was accompanied by red egg knocking

and sacrifice of a presentable capon. The colleague Gh. G. Popescu analyzed and presented the floral composition in Stan forest, Farcas commune.

A.2. Biotechnology Congress ‘Processing Plant Biotechnology as a Tool for the Exploitation of Mountain Lands’, organized by Università degli Studi di Torino, Torino, Italy, 1997. It was presented and published the paper: Corneanu G. C., Popescu G. G., Mihaela Corneanu, Elena Glodeanu, Hanescu V., Ileana Popescu. 1998 – Biology and enzymatic activity in *Lycopodium* species from Parâng Massif (Romania), published in the volume: Processing Plant Biotechnology as a Tool for the Exploitation of Mountain Lands, Eds. Silvano Scannerini et al., Acta Horticulturae, **457**: 105-108.

B. Achieved and published papers with novelties in different fields of scientific literature:

B.1. Re-vegetation on a ‘terrenum nudum’. Popescu G. G., Corneanu G. G., Costache I., Corneanu Mihaela et al., 1998 – The renovation of a terrestrial plant affected by derrick mud from Almaj-Mosneni (Dolj County). Acta Horti Botanici Bucurestiensis. Edit. Alo, Bucuresti **26**: 155-168.

B.2. Species of carnivorous plants cultivated in laboratory: Popescu G., Corneanu G. C., Popescu Ileana, Corneanu Mihaela. 1997 - *Pinguicula vulgaris* L., A carnivorous plant in Parâng Mountains. The systematics, biological, chorological, and ecological data; attempts of a laboratory culture. Acta Botanica Horti Bucurestiensis, Edit. Universitatii Bucuresti, **25**: 79-83.

C. Species of plants with bioactive substances. The species in which valuable bioactive substances are synthesized form an important group, which has been the subject of multiple investigations in the framework of different research projects won by competition. Among these, we mention the investigations carried out in the genus *Achillea* and the species *Nigella sativa*.

C.1. Corneanu G. C., Elena Glodeanu, Hanescu V., Popescu G. G., Mihaela Corneanu. 1997 – Enzymatic variability of some *Achillea* genotypes with different polyploidy level and from different geographical regions. Bul. Grădiniî Botanice Iași, **6**: 499-504.

C.2. Corneanu G. C., Simeanu V. D., Popescu G. G., Micle F. 1985 – Chorologic, anatomical studies on *Nigella* L. genus (Fam. *Ranunculaceae*) in Romania. Rev. Roum. Biol., Biol. Veget., Bucharest. **30**(2): 89-99.

C.3. Corneanu G. C., Popescu M., Aurelia Sitoris, Popescu G. G. 1986 – Researches concerning the biology of the *Nigella* L. species (Fam. *Ranunculaceae*) from Romania. Notule Botanicae Horti Agro Botanici, Cluj-Napoca, **16**: 151-163.

D. Species of pioneer plants cultivated on ash disposal sites and waste dumps, on land degraded by oil spills (Moreni Oil Extraction Site, Almaj Oil Exploitation, Dolj, etc.).

D.1. Reclamation of lands disturbed by oil pollution: Popescu G. G., Corneanu G. C., Costache I., Babeanu C., Corneanu M. 1998. The renovation of a terrestrial plant communities affected by derrick mud from Almaj-Mosneni (Dolj County). Acta Horti Bot. Buc. **26**: 155-168.

D.2. Restoration of the vegetal communities affected by different stress factors. Corneanu G. C., Popescu G. G., Mihaela Corneanu. 1993 – Renovation for terrestrial vegetal communities degraded by different stress factors. In: Agric. and Environmental Biotechnology: Biodiagnosis Biocell. Bioprocesses. Eds. P. M. Galletti, C. Rosso, S. Scannerini, A. Ugatni, E. Spoldi, G. Buffo. M. A. F. Servizi Torino. 183 pp.

D.3. Pioneer species installed on degraded lands, due to different pollutants generated by mining and electric power industries, etc.

E. Participation in COST research programmes. Corneanu M., Corneanu G. C., Răduțiu D., Popescu G. G., 2010 – The landscape natural and artificial rehabilitation of the degraded areas. First Meeting COST Action FAO901 ‘Putting Halophytes to Work - From Genes to Ecosystems’. Dept. Agricultural Engineering and Agronomy (DIAAT), University of Naples Federico II, Italy and Dept. of Agriculture and Forest Systems Management ‘Mediterranean’ Univ. of Reggio Calabria, Italy.

Field trips, especially in industrial areas or on water-borne terrain, were marked, besides pleasant events (reunion with colleagues, nature studies, etc.), also by some suspense events. Thus, one spring, we went to Botorogi, Gorj, to harvest plants in the field. At Ticleni, a truck came in front of us on the right. I saw my colleagues sitting on the front seats getting small and sliding beneath the dashboard to avoid a frontal contact with the road intruder. I shouted ‘aim the wheel’ and felt the impact with the wheels of the car in front of us. I know I ran to this, I opened the truck door and grabbed the driver by the throat. After some telephones, we went to a car service. At Botorogi, I went again a few years later, but also on a ‘delicate’ trip. Another spring, on the way to Targu Jiu, after a few days of rains, coming from Craiova, in a car from ICAS. Our driving colleague warned us that we were passing by Botorogi. He knew where the plants were located, so we headed for them. We harvested the plants, but we went too far into the water-drenched field and could not get out. I asked a tractor driver to get us out of there, but the tractor started to skid. Being near a car workshop, about 7-8 young people pushed the tractor and the car and we finally got out. We were invited to the nearby Forestry District to mark the event of the two cars recovery and the collecting of some specimens of the genus *Fritillaria* sp.

Improving the teaching activity of Biology teachers.

Professor Gheorghe G. Popescu was actively involved in improving the didactic training of Biology teachers by participating in the manner this process was achieved. Thus, he proposed the elaboration of Degree I theses on the topics with real practical application possibilities. The theses were achieved by Biology teachers from pre-university education system from southern counties (mainly from Oltenia and West Muntenia schools).

Another activity meant to improve the activity of Biology teachers was his participation in the competitions for occupying the positions of teacher in the school network. He made himself remarked by his academic attitude, balance in the analysis of different aspects that occurred during the evaluation activity of the capacity of the teachers involved in the competitions.

At one of the latest research projects, namely POLMEDJIU, we talked with Professor Gheorghe G. Popescu about the team that he recommends for us to do the botanical part. The area was known to us because we went together along the middle valley of the Jiu many times. He said he accepted to scientifically supervise the botanical research, but he recommended the team (Botany) and Mrs. Researcher Ioana Ciortan, Dr., for mushrooms. He specified that he personally selected those who were still in activity (didactic and scientific). We all knew it was his choice. He reminded us that we promised to visit him at Păusești-Otașău. He told us he wanted to come back home because he had a lot of work to do. Last autumn, we talked on the phone for the last time. He told us he had already moved in the country and started working. We were going to see each other in the near future.

Regretfully, I went on other occasions through Păusești-Otașău, but not specifically to meet the Professor. Our meetings were always agreeable, the professor having a little ironic and acidic voice. We shall meet you in another world, dear Georgică, perhaps less agitated and more alert to its members. You offered them everything you had and you could do, compared to what you received.

God rest you in peace!

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Received: March 21, 2017

Accepted: July 12, 2017