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The loss of Jean-Marie Géhu

A great man and a great scientist, Jean-Marie Géhu left us forever this year (born 3 April, 1930; departed 15 February, 2014). As a friend and a teacher for phytosociologists, Jean-Marie was a friendly, pleasant and elegant man. We will never forget his charisma, his talent as a communicator, and at the same time, his simplicity.



Jean-Marie Géhu in the vegetation of *Euphorbia officinarium* L. subsp. *echinus* (Hooker fil. & Cosson) Vindt, during an excursion to the South - West Morocco.

As the final and great act of his wish to enlighten and his altruism through which he communicated and taught Phytosociology, he left us with his own magnum opus: the “Dictionnaire de Sociologie et Synécologie Végétales”, edited by J. Cramer. In this book, Jean-Marie brought together a huge quantity of principles and concepts, demonstrating how his Phytosociology is entirely an ecological discipline. Through this writing, the real Plant Synecology was fully revived following severe and unfair criticism of his critics. Jean-Marie dedicated the book to the memory of his great past teachers who established the discipline: Josias Braun-Blanquet and Reinhold Tüxen. Moreover, he extended his dedication to all of the others who with passion and commitment have carried through the application and analysis of the Sygmatist phytosociological method.

Jean-Marie was also a great organiser who knew how to unite different generations of scientists with his periodical meetings organised at the "Regional Centre for Phytosociology". The proceedings of these meetings were published in the journal “Colloquese de Phytosociologie” that now has a collection of the huge range of articles that were related to the subjects chosen for each of the meetings.

Jean-Marie and his wife, Professor Jeanne Géhu-Franck, created the Regional Centre for Phytosociology together with a group of researchers, back in the 1970's, in their own house. In 1983, the same property was given to the municipality of Bailleul, to guarantee its sustainability. This is an old farm, located in the countryside of the French Fiandre, in the pleasant locality of Haendries of Bailleul, about 30 km from Lille. In a few years, the Centre became in reality a fundamental laboratory for research in basic phytosociology and as applied to the management of the environment, and

it became the “Conservatoire Botanique National de Bailleul”, one of the 11 that can now be found all over France.

In 1969, with the help of a group of scientist friends, Géhu created the “Amicale de Phytosociologie”, which in 1982 became “Amicale Francophone de Phytosociologie”. This was a truly universal cultural gathering, where everyone could freely express their ideas, in any language, without cultural or ideological censorship. Jean-Marie was a free man with very firm ideas that had grown and matured through his many years of direct experience in the field, although he never took on the role of a severe reviewer, allowing everyone to publish in the journals that he had started. As well as the already mentioned “Colloquese de Phytosociologie”, these included “Documents de Phytosociology”, which he managed for many years in collaboration with Franco Pedrotti, and “Braun-Blanquetia”, which was conceived with Franco Pedrotti and Salvador Rivas-Martínez.

In 2000, Jean-Marie and Salvador Rivas-Martínez formed the “Fédération Internationale de Phytosociologie” (FIP), the International Association for Vegetation Science, which united a series of national associations that were mainly European, but also from Algeria and Argentina. Jean-Marie took on the post as General Secretary of this organisation, and he was the main force behind it, while Salvador Rivas-Martinez was for many years its President. The activity of the Federation was mainly focused on providing a valid link between the participant associations, through the organisation of meetings and debates at an international level. This activity was later reduced mainly following the physical problems of its creator, Jean-Marie. Then, without its main spiritual and material founder, the Federation was definitively closed in Rome in 2013, after its last Congress.

Professor Géhu taught Botany in the Faculties of Pharmacy at the University of Lille and at the “René Descartes” University of Paris, and he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Natural Sciences at the University of Camerino. Jean-Marie leaves us with his huge number of publications, with over 600 articles and books, which represented for scientists of my generation the basic texts for our professional, scientific and cultural growth.

Personally, for me, Jean-Marie was like an older brother, as well as an excellent teacher and a true friend, and I sincerely miss him.

Edoardo Biondi