

## The journey is the reward: Life and work of Vojtěch Jarošík (1958–2013)

“It is with the deepest sadness that we announce that our dear colleague, eminent scientist and excellent teacher, Prof. RNDr. Vojtěch Jarošík, CSc. has passed away at the age of 54 after a long illness.” I dare to say that when this message appeared on the web site of the Faculty of Science of Charles University in Prague on 18 June 2013, an important period in the development of modern Czech ecology was over due to the passing of one of the most distinguished personalities in this field.

### Career

Vojtěch Jarošík was born in Kralovice, western Bohemia, on 7 November 1958. He attended primary school (1964–1973) and later on gymnasium in Plzeň (1973–1977) where he and I first met and became immediately close, united by a common interest in biology that became the fuel for our life-long friendship. Vojta successfully participated in secondary-school biological contests, that were held locally at particular schools all the way up to the national level. It was in such a contest that he undertook his first ecological study which was on the population dynamics of the pollen beetle, *Meligethes aeneus*, an important agricultural pest. He was awarded the first prize in that year. His interest in biology and agriculture, encouraged by his father who was an agricultural expert, brought him to study at the Czech Agricultural University in Prague in 1977. Although he moved to the Faculty of Science of Charles University after completing his first year



Fig. 1. Vojtěch Jarošík during sabbatical on Tongariro Mountain Track, New Zealand in 2011.

to follow his true interest in systematic biology, this episode left him with life-long deep relationship to agricultural sciences. This was later manifested by long-term cooperation with colleagues from this field and considering applied aspects of ecology in his work.

From there on, however, his career was closely linked with the Faculty of Science at the Charles University in Prague, where he commenced his studies in systematic biology in 1978, graduated in 1983, receiving the RNDr. title (similar to M. A.), and completed his CSc degree (*candidatus scientiarum*, equivalent to PhD) in 1984–1988 at the Department of Zoology. Within his postgraduate studies, he attended a course of biometry at Charles University and Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences in Prague (1985–1988), an effort that changed his professional career by drawing his interest towards statistical analysis of data, a field in which he later became renowned expert with a reputation greatly exceeding national boundaries.

His “agricultural ties” called again and brought him to his first position as a research entomologist at the Research Institute for Crop Production, Department of Entomology, Prague where he worked from 1986 to 1991. This is where Vojta began cooperating with Alois Honěk, a colleague with whom he built a long-term professional and personal relationship that yielded 15 joint papers in impact ranked journals to date. Following this position, a formal shift from agricultural research to biology ensued, this time for good – in April 1991 he became a faculty member, in 1994 Associate Professor of Ecology, and in 2006 full Professor of Ecology at his *alma mater*, the Faculty of Science, Charles University. For the sake of this biographic record, it should be added that beginning in April 2002 he was also affiliated with the Department of Invasion Ecology, Institute of Botany of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic in Průhonice.

As many young scientists in their thirties, Vojta quickly took advantage of the opportunities made available as the political situation changed at the end of 1990s. He left for a research stay at prestigious Imperial College at Silwood Park, University of London, Ascot, England where he stayed from October 1993 to March 1994, and during that time mastered the then popular GLIM statistical software by closely interacting with its author Mick Crawley. After coming back from Silwood Park, still in the same year, he left again for a three month stay (June to August 1994) at the School of Biological Sciences, University of East Anglia, in Norwich, England. This is where another fruitful and mutually enriching cooperation began and that lasted until the end of Vojta’s days – with Anthony Dixon, a leading expert in aphid research. Since the paper on population density and regulation processes in a tree-dwelling aphids in *Journal of Animal Ecology* in 1999, they published together 13 papers in impact ranked journals. Later on, Vojta was regularly visiting Norwich for shorter stays at the beginning of 2000s. He also closely cooperated with the Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique, Laboratoire de Biologie des Invertébrés, in Antibes, France where he visited for 2–5 months every year between 1995–1998. His last long-term research stay was with Lincoln University, New Zealand, from January to April 2011.

### **Scientist**

The long list of scientific papers he coauthored shows that both nationally and internationally, ecological research has lost an important and a creative personality. A handful of numbers illustrate this convincingly. With 106 papers, an H index of 34, and total number of citations exceeding 3000 (note that the figure for 2012 alone is 700, indicating rapidly increasing recognition of Vojta’s work) returned by Web of Science search as of November 2013, Vojtěch Jarošík was one of the most prolific and most cited researchers at the Prague Faculty of Science, and in the Czech ecology as a whole. While these indices are just numbers, the level of journals he published in is similarly impressive, with six papers in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, four in *Ecology Letters* and *Ecology*, and publications also in *Nature*, *American Naturalist*, *Ecological Monographs* and other prestigious journals. It is no surprise that



Fig. 2. Vojtěch Jarošík during sabbatical on Avalanche Peak, New Zealand in March 2011.

in 2013 he received the Bedřich Hrozný Award for excellent publication achievements from the Chancellor of the Charles University. Sadly, he was not able to attend the ceremony because of rapidly deteriorating health conditions.

In total, his bibliography, as listed below, includes almost 150 items. In addition to the papers in journals on Web of Science that define the scientometric output, he authored a book on growth and regulation of populations (Academia 2005) and coauthored another one that resulted from the international DAISIE project (see below) on biological invasions (Springer 2009). The account is completed by seven book chapters with mostly prestigious publishing houses and 23 papers in other journals, both international and Czech.

Ecologist, entomologist, statistician, invasion biologist ... the range of Vojta's interest was wide; more specifically, he listed his interests as population ecology with focus on regulation of pests and protection of rare species, thermal characteristics of ectotherm organisms, statistical modelling of biological data, and biological invasions. Nevertheless, insect ecology was Vojta's primary research interest as illustrated by the bibliography below. Within this research, one theme deserves special mention – his studies on thermal development of insects conducted in cooperation with Alois Honěk and Anthony Dixon. In papers in *American Naturalist* (2002) and *Proceedings of the Royal Society* (2004), they proved the existence of developmental isomorphy in a range of insect groups (a phenomenon when the proportion of total developmental time spent in a particular developmental stage does not change with temperature), and generalized this principle to a wider range of ectotherm organisms, respectively. The existence of rate isomorphy could be of

great practical importance, for example, in the timing of life-history events and in determining preadult thermal requirements.

At the beginning of the 2000s, Vojta's career found a new focus when he became involved with key European projects on the study of biological invasions. He began working with plant ecologists at the Department of Invasion Ecology at the Institute of Botany AS CR and took the lead on the statistical analysis of data. The projects included the 5th EU framework programme GIANT ALIEN (2002–2005), in which we focused on the ecology and control of giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), a large integrated project ALARM (Assessing LARge-scale environmental Risks with tested Methods, 2004–2008) and DAISIE (Delivering Alien Invasive Species Inventories for Europe, 2005–2007) within the 6th EU framework programme. In the latter project, which focused on building a European database of organisms introduced to this continent, he also used his entomological expertise to contribute to the survey of non-native insects. Finally, he took major part in the 7 FP project PRATIQUE (Enhancements of Pest Risk Analysis TechnIQUes; 2008–2011) to which he contributed by building predictive models of distribution of invasive pests.

The last decade saw a transformation of Vojtěch Jarošík into an almost full-time statistician. I was lucky that this shift in his research focus arrived hand in hand with his involvement in biological invasions and joining my team at the Institute of Botany. On more than 60 papers we wrote together since 2002, he was in full charge of data analysis. Working with him provided certainty that data were explored as thoroughly as possible, that the analyses were perfect, that Vojta always recognized potential weaknesses, and that he was never cornered by reviewers. The non-standard data we often worked with were perceived by him as a challenge. He invented new approaches, often fairly innovative, and pushed his creativity up to the limit especially when exploring the data mining approaches that became his favourite technique in recent years. He provided valuable feedback to the authors of the data-mining software such as CART, which resulted in his invited talk at the Salford Data Mining Conference in 2012.

### **Teacher**

Vojtěch Jarošík's legacy as a teacher is as important as that of a scientist. His greatest achievement that will secure him a place in the history of Czech ecology was founding the Department of Ecology at the Faculty of Science in 2004. It was the first department of ecology in the country focusing purely on ecology as a science, without relation to environmental issues (as previously established departments at the Palacký University in Olomouc and at the Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague). Vojta was the brain behind conceptual issues and outlining avenues of research directions and served for two three-year periods as the Head. During this time he ushered the department to take its place among the scientifically most prolific and excellent units of the faculty. Besides organization work, he lived a normal life of a university teacher ... supervising master and PhD students, writing textbooks, teaching courses such as Ecology (BSc. course), Population Ecology (MSc. course), Statistical Modelling (PhD. course), Advanced Statistical Methods (MSc. & PhD. Course), and Introduction to Agroecology.

### **Man**

In the international consortia, he enjoyed great respect and love from colleagues, many of whom became friends over years, not only for his statistical skills and entomological knowledge, but maybe even more so for being a very positive and cheerful person. It is not inappropriate to say that he was a good spirit of European research on biological invasions of the last decade. This reflects what kind of person he was; quite a few people have noted that they do not know of anyone who disliked Vojta. Married to Blanka since 1982, they raised two daughters, Anna (1984) and Cecilie

(1986), the younger one walking in her father's footsteps as graduated ecologist. The family was the central point of Vojta's life, providing him with strong rooting, happiness and energy.

The illness mentioned in the quotation opening this memorial was cancer. Vojta was diagnosed in autumn 2012 but continued working as a prolific scientist even during his subsequent difficult fight against this disease, virtually to the end of his days. The very last statistical analysis he completed was a metaanalysis of the effect of plant invaders on seed bank communities – a week before he passed away. He never gave up until the very last moments.

Many people will sorely miss Vojta not only as an authority and source of expert advice on biostatistics, but more importantly as a modest, tolerant and kind colleague, who was always ready to help, and as a friend who was able to see the world around us in a wider perspective. In my very personal perspective, the title of this obituary, borrowed from the title of the Steve Jobs book, fits very much Vojta's life journey. I suspect that the phrase "it isn't the winning or losing that matters, it's how you play the game" might have been his personal motto. For him too, the real rewards were the skills he developed, what he learned about himself, and, probably most importantly, what he did for other people along the way.

Petr Pyšek

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Petr Pyšek