



MIROSLAW GRUZEWSKI (FEBRUARY 15TH 1964–DECEMBER 24TH 2007)

OBITUARY

It was a shock to learn about the sudden death of our very popular and valued colleague and friend – MIROSLAW GRUZEWSKI, who died at the age of only 43, on Christmas Eve 2007. Ten days earlier he telephoned me from the hospital with information about his condition, and promised to call again once he got better...

I first met Mirek in 1987 during field work on the Zegrzyński Reservoir where he was collecting samples for his master's thesis. I remember an occasion when he was supposed to row in a boat for a few dozen metres from the shore and take benthos samples from a site. In our estimate it should take him some 15–20 minutes. However, the team left on the shore had to wait for Mirek's return for over 2 hours. It turned out that Mirek, not within hearing range any more, already in the boat had started examining, washing, sorting and describing the material. We were infuriated, but at the same time disarmed by his authentic curiosity of nature, great enthusiasm and perfectionist's attitude to the task.

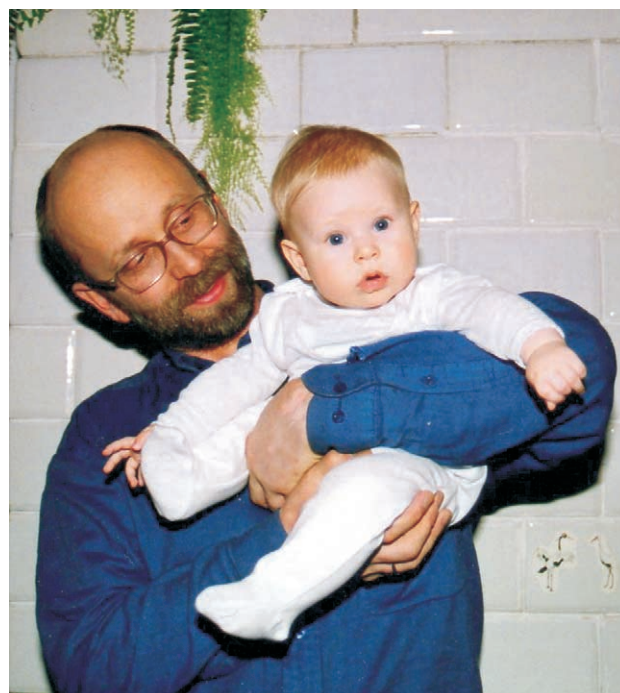
Mirek was born in Wizajny in the Suwałki region and since 1972 lived near Łomża. In 1983–1988 he studied biology at the Agricultural Faculty of the Agricultural-Pedagogical University in Siedlce (at present University of Podlasie). He prepared his master's thesis on the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of benthic molluscs of the Zegrzyński Reservoir in the Department of Ecology and Environment Protection, under supervision of Prof. dr hab. ANNA STAŃCZYKOWSKA, and I was the referee. It was my first thesis to referee and the first time I took part in a master's exam.

The last time I saw Mirek was twenty years later – in August 2007 in Drozdowo, where we went with Dr. BEATA JAKUBIK and Dr. ANDRZEJ KOŁODZIEJCZYK – he was collecting his last samples from oxbows of the

Narew River, to use them for the doctoral dissertation he was about to finish.

In the meantime he made professional advancement at the Nature Museum in Drozdowo, including a few years directorship; his other activities included scientific and editorial work, public education, moving house, successful family life, as well as participation in consecutive Polish Malacological Seminars and Benthological Workshops during which we often met.

Mirek was the kind of person who is very rare nowadays: a natural historian with a very wide range of interests. These interests were only partly reflected in his published papers. Besides ecology of molluscs and



Mirek with his daughter Łucja. Photo T. GRUZEWSKA



other benthic organisms of rivers, oxbows and springs, Mirek dealt with nature inventories of the Łomża region, and monitoring of many important vertebrate and invertebrate taxa: reptiles (including pond turtle), bats, butterflies, caddisflies and aquatic beetles. Materials from these studies were used during preparation of the Polish Herpetological Atlas and the Distribution Atlas of the Butterflies of Poland. Most of his research was carried out in protected areas: Łomża Landscape Park of the Narew Valley, Biebrza National Park and Wigry National Park.

Mirek was fascinated by the wild, freely meandering Narew River and its oxbows which each year looked different. When in early 1990s he started his research on the oxbow molluscs, he was the first to study aquatic invertebrates of these water bodies. He was a hydrobiologist and wanted other hydrobiologists to know and recognise the richness of aquatic habitats of the Narew Valley, instead of only passing through it on their way to the Mazurian or Suwałki Lakeland.

I remember him as an unequalled driver and guide in the wilderness of the wetlands of the Narew Valley when he took us in his ancient Opel Kadett to mysterious, unaccessible and picturesque oxbows. Field work was Mirek's element.

Mirek's doctoral dissertation on the molluscs of the Narew oxbows on the background of their limnological character was nearly finished... The materials – documenting the aquatic malacofauna of the Narew

oxbows – will be published in the *Drozdowskie Zeszyty Przyrodnicze* of which he was editor in chief.

A very important part of Mirek's activity was public education in broad sense, and not only within natural history. The Nature Museum in Drozdowo was aimed at such education. Located in a beautiful manor of the Lutosławski family, it attracted people interested in nature, history and culture. It hosted concerts, painting contests for children, topical meetings...

Museum Director Mirosław Grużewski was very well known and popular among the local people. He gave a few hundred weekly popular talks about natural history on the local radio; in his talks he discussed problems of nature conservation, biodiversity and ecology.

Mirek had a very rich and interesting personality. Though we met often, and worked in the field together, I always would have liked to spend more time with him. I would have liked to enjoy his knowledge, kindness and openness much longer. His untimely death closed a certain chapter in malacological studies. The person who left us was an outstanding specialist, a wise and good man, a devoted colleague and an infallible friend. We shall remember him not only as the main character of memories and anecdotes.

KRZYSZTOF LEWANDOWSKI

Department of Ecology and Environmental
Protection, University of Podlasie, B. Prusa 12,
08-110 Siedlce, Poland