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STANISŁAW MYZYK (1956–2026): A LIFE DEVOTED TO MOLLUSCS. OBITUARY

ABSTRACT: This obituary commemorates Stanisław Myzyk (1956–2026), an independent Polish malacologist whose meticulous long-term studies made a significant contribution to the knowledge of molluscan biology and life-history traits. Through decades of field observations and laboratory cultures, he produced comprehensive accounts of the development, reproduction, and ecology of 30 species of land and freshwater molluscs. Despite chronic illness and the eventual loss of his eyesight, he remained actively engaged with the malacological community for many years. In recognition of his scientific achievements and dedication, he was elected an Honorary Member of the Polish Malacological Society. His work represents a lasting contribution to Polish malacology and continues to provide valuable data for ecological and conservation research.

EARLY YEARS AND EDUCATION

Stanisław (Stasiek, Staszek) Myzyk was born on 6 July 1956 in Sąpolno, Poland, to Antoni Myzyk and Bronisława (née Bucław). He grew up with five siblings: his sisters Jadwiga (born 1947), Stanisława (born 1949), Maria (born 1952), and Zofia (born 1958), and his brother Kazimierz (born 1962).

He remained closely connected to his hometown throughout his life. In September 1963, he began his education at the primary school in Sąpolno. From an early age, he distinguished himself through outstanding academic performance. He participated in school recitation competitions and regularly performed at local community events. His greatest aptitude, however, was in mathematics. In 1971, he won first place in the district Mathematics Competition, which qualified him for admission to the General Secondary School in Człuchów without entrance examinations.

In September 1971, he entered the school's mathematics and physics programme. Every day, he travelled to school by train, walking more than two kilometres to the railway station in Czosnowo before continuing his journey. Despite these demanding daily commutes, he remained one of the top students in his class. During his final year of secondary education, he achieved further success, being placed highly in the regional finals of the Physics and Chemistry Olympiads. These achievements qualified him for admission to university programmes in physics or chemistry without entrance examinations.

During his years at secondary school, Staszek was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, a condition that profoundly influenced both his subsequent life and many of the decisions he made. After graduating from secondary school, he enrolled in the Faculty of Chemistry at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. He soon realised, however, that his chronic illness and the nature of the profession would prevent him from pursuing a career as a chemist safely. Reluctantly, he withdrew from his studies after only a short time and returned to his family home in Sąpolno.

Unable to find employment for several months, he decided to devote this period to self-education. He became interested in the Esperanto movement and joined the nearest local Esperanto club, based at the Railway Cultural Centre in Słupsk. Staszek began studying Esperanto through a correspondence course and later recalled that its logical and highly regular grammar particularly appealed to his mathematical way of thinking. His opportunities to practise the language, however, were limited, mainly for financial reasons.

On 1 February 1977, he began working at the Municipal Office in Przechlewo, initially as an accountant and later as Chief Accountant. In 1986, he was awarded second place in the provincial compe-

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tition on the Code of Administrative Procedure, reflecting both his professional competence and meticulous approach to administrative work.

When he developed an interest in malacology in the late 1980s, he faced yet another challenge: the vast majority of the scientific literature relevant to his interests was published in English. Having previously studied only Russian and French at school, he had to teach himself English from scratch. At first, he translated papers sentence by sentence with the aid of a dictionary, but gradually acquired sufficient proficiency to read scientific literature with ease. This level of language competence proved entirely adequate for following international research and incorporating new knowledge into his own work. He adopted a similar approach to German, which also enabled him to consult the relevant scientific literature despite having received no formal instruction in the language.

NATURAL HISTORY INTERESTS AND MALACOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES

Although he achieved excellent results in biology at school, his early interests lay primarily in mathematics, physics, and astronomy. His fascination with natural history developed only in adulthood (Fig. 1). A pivotal moment came in 1982, when he purchased a second-hand microscope. After painstakingly restoring it himself, he was able to begin microscopic observations of organisms that he had previously known only from books. Initially, his attention focused on plants, but the purchase of an atlas of invertebrates in 1984 redirected his interests towards the animal kingdom.

Another turning point came in 1986, when he discovered shells of *Anodonta cygnea* during one of his walks. From then on, he systematically collected the shells of snails and bivalves, gradually expanding his knowledge of their diversity. In January 1988, he came across a short notice about the Polish Malacological Seminars in the magazine "Przyroda Polska". He immediately registered to participate and, later that year, attended his first Malacological Seminar in Krościenko nad Dunajcem. Most of the presentations were entirely new to him and often difficult to follow. However, the encouragement and kindness of the seminar organiser, Stefan Alexandrowicz, proved pivotal to his future development. Professor Alexandrowicz encouraged him to continue learning and promised to send him an identification key to Polish molluscs, providing the support and motivation that helped shape his future scientific career.

Over the following 24 years, Myzyk became a regular participant in the Polish Malacological Seminars.

Fig. 1. Stanisław Myzyk on his way to fieldwork. Photo: KAZIMIERZ MYZYK

Through his dedication, scientific curiosity, and warm personality, he gradually became one of the best-known and most respected members of the Polish malacological community, earning not only professional recognition but also the friendship and esteem of his colleagues.

Despite his progressively deteriorating health, Myzyk remained actively engaged with the scientific community and continued to conduct regular field observations. After retiring on disability pension, he devoted much of his time to searching for molluscs in the field and to improving his identification skills through independent study.

Another turning point in his malacological interests came in April 1991, when he unexpectedly found an unusually large specimen of *Valvata cristata*. His subsequent observations and laboratory culture of this species led him to conclude that its biology was far less thoroughly understood than the available literature suggested. He presented his first original findings at the Polish Malacological Seminar in 1993. There, Professor Andrzej Piechocki encouraged him to extend his studies to other species of *Valvata*, marking the beginning of his systematic scientific research.

Stanisław Myzyk belonged to the small group of researchers who devoted many years to detailed studies of the biology and life cycles of molluscs. Over the following years, he consistently expanded his investigations of the Polish malacofauna, earning recognition as an exceptionally meticulous field naturalist and an outstanding authority on the biology of freshwater molluscs. His scientific achievements were founded on long-term laboratory cultures and systematic observations carried out over many successive seasons. Such studies are among the most time-consuming in malacological research, making comprehensive life-history datasets for numerous species exceptionally rare and of enduring scientific value.

He began his scientific career by investigating the life cycles of snails of the genus *Valvata*, resulting in detailed accounts of the biology of three species: *Valvata cristata*, *V. macrostoma*, and *V. piscinalis*. He subsequently turned his attention to members of the family Vertiginidae, publishing studies on the structure and development of their eggs, followed by a comprehensive synthesis of the biology of ten species within this family. His next research focus was *Anisus vorticulus*, while the culmination of his long-term investigations on bivalves was a synthesis of the reproductive biology and fecundity of sixteen species of the genus *Pisidium*.

Altogether, these studies encompassed 30 species of molluscs, providing detailed descriptions of their development, reproduction, and principal life-history characteristics. Such a comprehensive body of work on the biology of so many species, produced by a sin-

Fig. 2. Stanisław Myzyk giving a lecture entitled “Our Snails and Bivalves”, Szymbark, 10 September 2011. Photo: Kazimierz Myzyk

gle author, is exceptional in Polish malacology. Owing to the consistent methodology applied throughout his studies, his publications constitute a remarkably coherent and comparable body of life-history data.

Despite the taxonomic diversity of the organisms he investigated, all of Myzyk's studies were united by a common goal: to achieve as complete an understanding of their biology as possible. He examined embryonic development, age at sexual maturity, reproductive seasonality, fecundity, growth rate, longevity, and the influence of environmental conditions on these processes. Particularly valuable were the comparative aspects of his research, which revealed both shared patterns and species-specific differences in reproduction and life-history strategies.

Throughout his publishing career, Stanisław Myzyk benefited from the generous support of Professor Beata M. Pokryszko, who translated his manuscripts into English and provided linguistic editing for papers published in "Folia Malacologica". Her long-standing assistance helped bring the results of his research to the wider international malacological community.

The significance of Stanisław Myzyk's scientific legacy extends far beyond descriptive accounts of individual species. The observations he painstakingly accumulated over many years provided a foundation for subsequent studies on the ecology and conservation of molluscs. One example is a co-authored publication on the population ecology of *Vertigo moulinsiana*, in which its life-history data were used to explain the effects of microhabitat characteristics and water level on species distribution, seasonal abundance, and overwintering success. These findings continue to be used in contemporary ecological analyses and population modelling, demonstrating that the value of rigorous basic research does not diminish with time but often becomes fully apparent only in subsequent stages of scientific progress.

His scientific work also attracted considerable public and media attention. The first newspaper article devoted to the "snail researcher from Sąpolno" appeared in the regional newspaper "Głos Pomorza" in 1998. Wider publicity followed in 2007, when an internet report incorrectly suggested that he had described more than one hundred new snail species. In reality, this number referred to the species he had recorded in the vicinity of Sąpolno. Nevertheless, his remarkable contribution to documenting the local malacofauna attracted widespread interest from newspapers, radio, and television.

Stanisław Myzyk was also deeply committed to sharing his knowledge with others (Figs 2–3). He delivered lectures and practical classes on malacology for school students, biology teachers, and staff of landscape parks, thereby fostering a broader appreciation of molluscan biology and the importance of their conservation.

Fig. 3. Stanisław Myzyk leading an educational workshop in Szymbark, 10 September 2011. Photo: KAZIMIERZ MYZYK

LEGACY AND RECOGNITION

For much of his adult life, Stanisław Myzyk lived with several chronic illnesses. Nevertheless, he remained remarkably active for many years, continuing to pursue his interests in natural history and malacology. In 1989, he retired on a disability pension because of partial incapacity for work. By 2009, he had permanently lost his sight, forcing him to discontinue his scientific research. From 2012 onwards, he was no longer able to attend the Polish Malacological Seminars independently. However, thanks to the support of his brother, Kazimierz Myzyk, he continued to participate in these meetings and remained an active and enthusiastic contributor to scientific discussions (Fig. 4). Despite his progressively deteriorating health, he maintained his interest in malacology and remained closely connected with the scientific community until the end of his life.

Fig. 4. Stanisław Myzyk with his brother Kazimierz (left). Photograph courtesy of Kazimierz Myzyk. Wieliczka, 23 September 2015

In recognition of his scientific achievements and many years of service to the malacological community, he was elected an Honorary Member of the Polish Malacological Society in 2014. The distinction was formally conferred during the Polish Malacological Seminar held in Wieliczka in September 2015 (Figs 5–6). This honour was particularly significant, as Stanisław Myzyk became the first Honorary Member of the Society who was neither a university academic nor a professor, but an independent researcher whose contributions had earned the highest respect of the Polish malacological community.

Fig. 5. Stanisław Myzyk receiving congratulations from Professor Andrzej Wiktor during the ceremony conferring Honorary Membership of the Polish Malacological Society, Wieliczka, 24 September 2015. Photo: KAZIMIERZ MYZYK

Fig. 6. Stanisław Myzyk upon receiving Honorary Membership of the Polish Malacological Society, Wieliczka, 24 September 2015. Photo: KAZIMIERZ MYZYK

Stanisław Myzyk passed away on 6 May 2026 at his family home in Sąpolno. He will be remembered by his friends and by the entire Polish malacological community as an exceptionally modest, kind, and persevering person who pursued his scientific passion with remarkable determination despite living with severe chronic illness. His scientific achievements and long-standing presence within the Polish malacological community have secured him a lasting place in the history of Polish malacology. He leaves behind not only a valuable scientific legacy but also an enduring example of perseverance, patience, and dedication to science in the face of adversity.

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APPENDIX 1. STANISŁAW MYZYK – LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

1993

Myzyk S. Obserwacje rozrodu *Valvata cristata* w hodowli. IX Krajowe Seminarium Malakologiczne, Mysłów, 10–13.V.1993.

2000

Myzyk S. Malakofauna Doliny Brdy w okolicy Sąpolna (Pojezierze Pomorskie). XVI Krajowe Seminarium Malakologiczne, Hel 20-22.IX.2000, Streszczenia, pp. 40–41.

Myzyk S. Malacofauna of the Brda river valley near Sąpolno. In: Pokryszko B. M. The 16th Polish Malacological Seminar – what do we do? Seminar Report. Folia Malacologica 8(4): 292.
https://doi.org/10.12657/folmal.008.025

2002

Myzyk S. Life cycle of *Valvata cristata* O. F. Müller, 1774 (Gastropoda: Heterobranchia) in the laboratory. Folia Malacologica 10(2): 47–75.
https://doi.org/10.12657/folmal.010.006

2004

Myzyk S. A new locality of two rare vertiginid species (Gastropoda: Pulmonata: Vertiginidae) in NW Poland. Folia Malacologica 12(2): 57–61.
https://doi.org/10.12657/folmal.012.002

Myzyk S. Life cycle of *Valvata macrostoma* Mörch, 1864 (Gastropoda: Heterobranchia) in the laboratory. Folia Malacologica 12(3): 111–136.
https://doi.org/10.12657/folmal.012.008

2005

Myzyk S. O biologii *Vertigo moulinsiana* (Dupuy 1849) (Gastropoda: Pulmonata: Vertiginidae). Materiały Konferencyjne, 21. Krajowe Seminarium Malakologiczne, Toruń-Ciechocinek, pp. 31–32.

Myzyk S. On the biology of *Vertigo moulinsiana* (Dupuy, 1849) (Gastropoda: Pulmonata: Vertiginidae). In: Pokryszko B. M. The 21st Polish Malacological Seminar. Seminar Report. Folia Malacologica 13(3): 128–129.
https://doi.org/10.12657/folmal.013.012

Myzyk S. Egg structure of some vertiginid species (Gastropoda: Pulmonata: Vertiginidae). Folia Malacologica 13(4): 169–175.
https://doi.org/10.12657/folmal.013.016

2007

Myzyk S. Comparison of bionomics of *Valvata cristata*, *V. macrostoma* and *V. piscinalis*. In: Pokryszko B. M. The 23rd Polish Malacological Seminar, Seminar Report. Folia Malacologica 15(3): 134–135.
https://doi.org/10.12657/folmal.015.013

Myzyk S. Life cycle of *Valvata piscinalis* (O. F. Müller, 1774) (Gastropoda: Heterobranchia) in the laboratory. Folia Malacologica 15(4): 145–174.
https://doi.org/10.12657/folmal.015.014

2008

Myzyk S. Life cycle of *Anisus vorticulus* (Troschel, 1834) (Gastropoda: Pulmonata: Planorbidae) in the laboratory. Folia Malacologica 16(4): 207–215.
https://doi.org/10.12657/folmal.016.016

2011

Myzyk S. Contribution to the biology of ten vertiginid species. Folia Malacologica 19(2): 55–80.
https://doi.org/10.2478/v10125-011-0004-9

Myzyk S. Porównanie rozrodu *Pisidium casertanum, globulare* i *ponderosum*. Problemy Współczesnej Malakologii 2011. XXVII Krajowe Seminarium Malakologiczne, Toruń – Tleń 6-8.04.2011, Streszczenia, p. 51.

2012

Myzyk S. Reproduction of *Pisidium casertanum, P. globulare* and *P. ponderosum* – comparison. In: Pokryszko B. M. The 27th Polish Malacological Seminar, Seminar Report. Folia Malacologica 20(1): 60.
https://doi.org/10.2478/v10125-012-0001-7

2014

Myzyk S. The predator *Aegopinella nitidula* (Draparnaud, 1805) and its prey *Perforatella bidentata* (Gmelin, 1791) (Gastropoda: Pulmonata). Folia Malacologica 22(3): 225–227.
https://doi.org/10.12657/folmal.022.011

2016

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2017

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Myzyk S. On the reproduction of *Pisidium* C. Pfeiffer, 1821 (Bivalvia: Sphaeriidae) from Sąpolno (NW. Poland). Folia Malacologica 25(3): 175–194.
https://doi.org/10.12657/folmal.025.014

2020

Lipińska A. M., Ćmiel A., Kwaśna D., **Myzyk S.**, Zając K., Zając T. The role of microhabitat and water level in regulating the small-scale distribution, seasonal abundance and overwintering success of the protected snail *Vertigo moulinsiana* in a natural wetland. Polish Journal of Ecology 68(3): 229–241.
https://doi.org/10.3161/15052249PJE2020.68.3.004