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In Memoriam, Academician Prof. Dr. Osor Shagdarsuren (1929-2010)

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In memoriam Academician Prof. Dr. Osor Shagdarsuren (1929-2010)

We are deeply saddened to announce that Academician, Professor Osor Shagdarsuren passed away due to the apoplexy on Tuesday, 2 February 2010, at the age of 81. He was one of the most respected Mongolian ornithologist, biologist and educator. The Mongolian scientific community has lost one of its greatest members, who was the first National ornithologist in the country.

O. Shagdarsuren was born in Osor, a herder family in Matad soum, Dornod province by end of winter and beginning of the Lunar new year of 1929. When he was a child he was herding his family's sheep and goats on the vast grassland steppe in eastern Mongolia. At the age of seven years O. Shagdarsuren entered the Russian school at the Choibalsan town which was the closest province centre to his home. He graduated the school in 1948 and entered the National University of Mongolia. In 1955, he graduated from the University specializing Chemistry and Biology and returned to his soum (region) as a teacher.

In 1959-60 he organized the first Mongolian-Russian ornithological field surveys in the Gobi together with famous Russian Professor G.P. Dementiev and his students. In the same year O. Shagdarsuren became one of the foreign students of Professor G.P. Dementiev and received his invitation and recommendation to study and complete his Ph.D. at the Moscow State University. He defended his Ph.D. thesis on the "Raptors of central and southern Mongolia and their practical importance" under the supervision of Professor G.P. Dementiev from 1961 to 1964. Doctor O. Shagdarsuren reviewed the taxonomy of Saker falcons in Mongolia and Russia together with Professor G.P. Dementiev and mentioned about it in his Ph.D. thesis. They described morphological polymorphisms of the species based on the field surveys in the years. Dr. O. Shagdarsuren thesis has changed attitude of Prof. G.P. Dementiev on the systematic position of the Altay Falcon, an enigmatic question of that day, and changed the taxonomic treatment of this form, which after his thesis was viewed as a variation of the Saker falcon. Their taxonomy review for the Saker falcon and its variability is still valuable document for falcon taxonomy. After successfully completed his study in Russia, he returned home as the first ornithologist in his country where were few educated people in the biological science. After he returned the country, he expanded his research to reptiles, mammals, animal husbandry, ecology, and evolutionary biology. At same time he took up several positions at the National University of Mongolia and the Mongolian Academy of Sciences. Doctor O. Shagdarsuren extensively studied game animals and pastoral livestock husbandry in Mongolia and earned his Doctor of Sciences degree on the "Game animals of Mongolia, present and future trends of hunting" at the Lomonosov Moscow State University in 1972. He was elected as a Corresponding member of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences in 1982, received his "Professor" title in 1984 and became an "Academician" in 1991.

Academician Professor O. Shagdarsuren was an active initiator, developer, and manager of the leading scientific and high educations in the country. Until his final days he remained a professor at the National University of Mongolia, continued teaching in the Department of Zoology. He served as the director of the Institute of Biology at the Mongolian Academy of Sciences from 1964-1982 and president of the National University of Mongolia in 1983- 1989. Acad., Prof. O. Shagdarsuren initiated and founded new laboratories including Biophysics, Biochemistry-microbiology and Ecology together with members of Faculty of Biology at the National University of Mongolia and Laboratory of Genetics at the Mongolian Academy of Sciences

Academician Prof. O. Shagdarsuren supported and involved in activities of governmental and non-governmental organizations in mammalogy and ornithology fields at the same time of his teaching at the University and leading the national and international projects. He was an honorary member of the Mongolian Ornithological Society. His advice and comment on bird research

and conservation activities initiated by the Society were bright, sharp and invaluable. All members of the Society will miss his brilliant support and generous advise.

Academician Prof. O. Shagdarsuren was the leading scientists in the country and working in the Joint Soviet-Mongolian biological expedition of the Russian Academy of Sciences and Mongolian Academy of Sciences and also the Joint Mongolian-German Biological Expedition until 1990. He was a chief editor and lead author for many scientific publications from these significant international expeditions. He also was as chairman of the scientific committee for Doctorate degrees in biological sciences for many years and his leadership has brought new standards to the degrees granted by Mongolian Institutions.

Academician Prof. O. Shagdarsuren was the first national ornithologist who collected and analyzed all data of many different species of birds for the time, and published scientific papers on the biology, ecology and conservation of corvids (1960), vultures (1963), Amur falcon (1964), raptors of Mongolia (1958-1964), Saker falcon (1998-2006) and steppe raptors (1998-2006). With his effort and involvement a total of 4 species of Buzzards, 3 species of Vultures, White-tailed eagle, and 12 species of owls are protected in the country under the strict law. He led scientific works on the census of rare and endangered wildlife in the country, and wrote and edited the Mongolian Red Data Book in 1987 listed 17 species of birds and second edition of the book in 1997 that contained of 30 species of rare birds. He also supervised several wildlife management projects that were never practiced in Mongolia, such as the introduction and re-introductions of Musk rats to Khar Us Lake and Mongolian Gazelle to the Khomiin Steppes in western Mongolia. These activities were essential measures for wildlife conservation in the country.

Academician Prof. O. Shagdarsuren was an inspirational teacher and mentor for generation to generations of scientists, and a renowned professor of the National University of Mongolia. He mentored more than 1000 students, and supervised over 20 Ph.D. and Doctorate candidates, and offered advice and guidance to many more in biology and agriculture fields.

Academician Prof. O. Shagdarsuren wrote over 200 papers and publications including famous now classical monographs such as "Raptors of Mongolia" "Rare mammals of the Mongolian People's Republic," "Contributions to the study of mammals in the Khangai mountains," "Issues in the conservation and management of Mammals of Mongolia", "Game animals and their conservation in Mongolia," "Natural selection and nomadic livestock husbandry," "Pastoral livestock husbandry and related issues in theoretical biology" and "Pastoral livestock husbandry in Mongolia". He also authored many textbooks on biology and ecology subjects including "Zoology I," "Zoology II", "Pastoral livestock husbandry and its theoretical basic" and "Essentials of Ecology", and published numerous articles and essays in mainstream newspapers, magazines, and journals.



O. Shagdarsuren, September 2008.

Academician Prof. O. Shagdarsuren was a powerful political and social activist. He was appointed as a Representative to the People's Great Khural, elected as honorary Mongolian consul to the Biophysics Centre of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance Organization, Chairman of the Mongolian Union, and Director General of the Mongolia and India Friendship Union. Finally, he was actively involved in various governmental committees on science, technology and high education. The Mongolian Government decorated him with several high ranking medals and honours, such as the Mongolian State laureate Teacher, Order of North Star, Honorary Credential of the Government of Mongolia, anniversary medals of the People's Revolution of Mongolia, and Best Employee titles from educational, science, agriculture, and environmental sectors. Students, whom he picked up and invested his time and energy, are now famous active leaders of ornithology in Mongolia and high education.

Academician, Professor O. Shagdarsuren was very friendly and kind man, and a committed teacher and scientist until the end of his life. We will miss his sense of humour, broad knowledge of almost any scientific subject and inspiration, which he generated in all of us and his numerous students.

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