

In memoriam – Stepan Stoyko

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Abstract

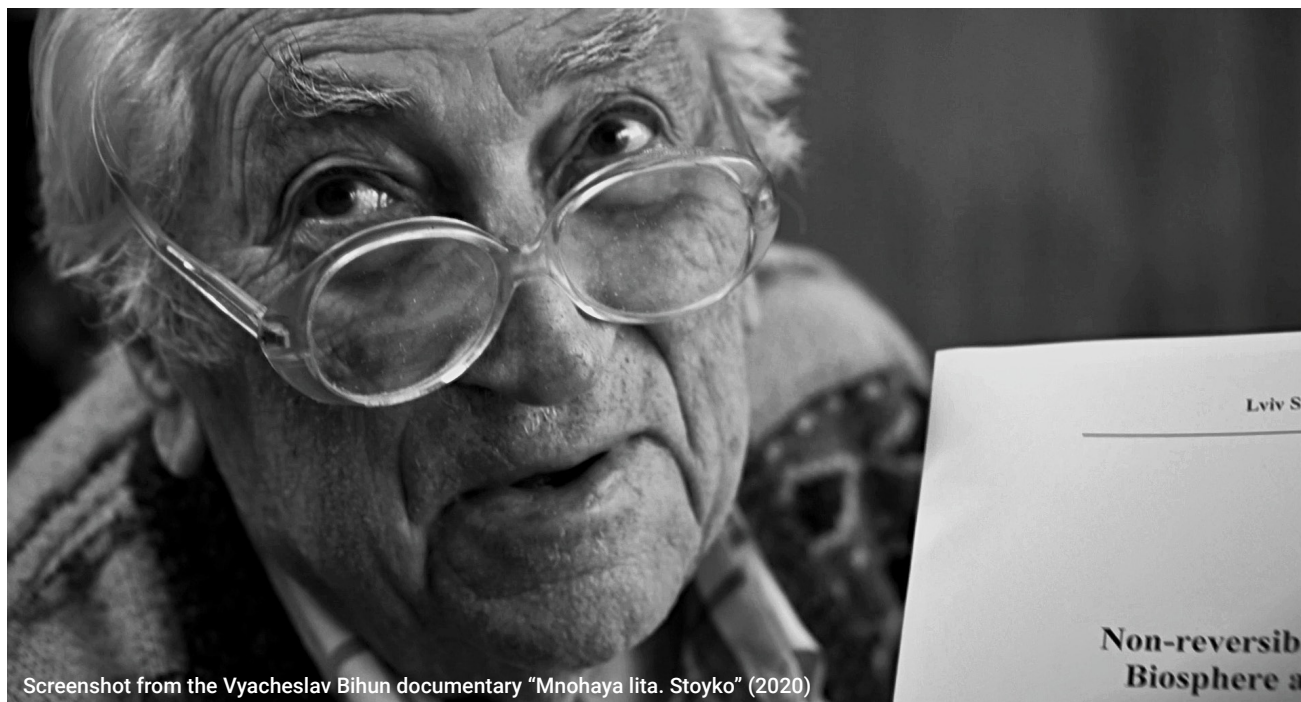
On October 22 of this year, professor Stepan Stoyko – a prominent Ukrainian scientist and nature conservationist, died at the age of 100. Until his last days, he had a clear mind, was active in nature conservation, and continued working on academic publications. His last research article was published in September 2020, approximately one month before his death. For decades he was a principal investigator and head of a department in the State Museum of Natural History and the Institute of Ecology of the Carpathians. Stepan Stoyko created many protected areas, including the Carpathian State Reserve (Carpathian Biosphere Reserve), Roztochya Nature Reserve, and Carpathian, Yavorivskiy, Shatsky, Uzhansky, Skole Beskids, and Synevyr national nature parks. After the catastrophic floods in Transcarpathia in 1998, and 2001, he brought attention to clear-cutting, including the Carpathian forests' illegal cutting. In his late 90s, Stepan Stoyko supported the initiative group Free Svydovets that protected one of the most important biodiversity islands in the Ukrainian Carpathians – Svydovets mountain range. His support was crucial to prevent building the largest Carpathian ski resort and conserve unique mountain old-growth forests, sub-alpine, and alpine grasslands. I knew Stepan Stoyko for over 20 years since I was 15 years old. Here I would like to share my perspective on his contribution to nature conservation and environmental science. To commemorate his scientific life and contributions, the Ukrainian community of botanists and ecologists Dovkolobotanika established Stepan Stoyko Award in the fields of nature conservation and environmental science for undergraduate, graduate, and PhD students.

Keywords: Stepan Stoyko, Carpathians, nature conservation, Stepan Stoyko Award

The early years

Stepan Stoyko was born on March 14, 1920, in Krychovo village, Czechoslovakia (today in Transcarpathia, Ukraine). From 1930 to 1938, he studied in Khust Gymnasium, the classical gymnasium (secondary school) focused on natural sciences, foreign languages, and theology. He learned Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, Russian, German, and Polish languages. Stepan Stoyko also had an in-depth knowledge of Latin language and literature and his favorite book during that time was “De rerum natura” by Titus Lucretius Carus. The II World War interrupted his education

and civil life in general. He managed to study only three semesters at the University of Pécs during 1942–1943. During the war and right after it, his knowledge of foreign languages saved his life – there were very few translators who knew so many languages, and their lives mattered. After the war, Stepan Stoyko moved to Lviv. He became a student of the Forestry Faculty of Lviv Polytechnic Institute, which was reorganized into the Lviv Agricultural Institute. After graduation, Stepan Stoyko was appointed as a forest engineer to the Uzhhorod forest enterprise, where he worked until 1951.



Academic career. Uzhhorod – Kyiv – Lviv

In 1951 the prominent Ukrainian forest scientist Professor Petro Pohrebnyak visited Transcarpathia. Stepan Stoyko guided him through the local forests and showed him the most typical, as well as the most interesting parts of them. Petro Pohrebnyak invited him to become his PhD student, and Stepan Stoyko agreed. He moved to Kyiv in 1952 and in 1955 defended his PhD in the field of botany on the oak forests of the Transcarpathia. He returned to Lviv and worked in Lviv Forestry Institute until 1964 and then in the State Museum of Natural History. In 1969 he completed habilitation, and in 1970 Prof. Dr.habil. Stepan Stoyko founded the department of natural ecosystems' conservation in the Museum. This fact is important for the understanding of his attitude to nature conservation. He always was thinking big, and 50 years ago, he clearly understood that it is impossible to protect species or communities in destroyed or severely damaged habitats. In the Museum and then in the Institute of Ecology of the Carpathians he worked on creating new protected areas to conserve as much of the most valuable ecosystems as possible. He created many protected areas, including the Carpathian State Reserve (later, Carpathian Biosphere Reserve), Roztochya Nature Reserve, and Carpathian, Yavorivskiyi, Shatsky, Uzhansky, Skole Beskids, and Synevyr national nature parks.

Meanwhile, he continued publishing academic papers and books on nature conservation and environmental science, with special attention given to conservation of the plant communities and elevational changes of plant communities. He also published a number of popular books about nature in general, plants, and natural monuments. He considered that the best way to conserve something unique is to explain that it is unique to others. He often said that when only several specialists know the object's value or the phenomenon – it is in danger. If something has no value to the majority – it may be easily destroyed. He explained that most of people would not burn money in a stove because they understand the value of money. Hence, nature conservationists' mission is to explain the value of natural ecosystems and that they are much more valuable than money.

Being a polyglot, Stepan Stoyko translated many important publications from other languages to Ukrainian and Russian, participated in numerous international conferences, and had good friends and colleagues abroad. For example, working together with such famous Czech botanists as Prof. Alois Zlatník and Dr.habil. Miloš Deyl provided him the opportunity to stay in the context of current European science and avoid isolation. Moreover, he managed to continue some studies of the Czech scientists



Screenshot from the Vyacheslav Bihun documentary "Mnohaya lita. Stoyko" (2020)

and protect most of the reserves previously described by Alois Zlatník.

Ideas of Stepan Stoyko and his research led to publishing the Green Book of Ukrainian SSR – the first document that protected not just the species, but the whole communities. After two catastrophic floods in Transcarpathia in 1998 and 2001, Stepan Stoyko brought attention to the problem of clear-cuts in mountain forests and in particular illegal logging. His efforts managed to decrease the scale of logging in the Carpathians after the floods.

Professor emeritus

When I met Stepan Stoyko – he was already professor emeritus. He was 80 years old and had several courses on nature conservation at the Geography Faculty of the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv. I am highly grateful to Prof. Semen Kukurudza, who got me acquainted with Prof. Stepan Stoyko. I have already read several of his books, and the moment of meeting the author was exciting. Since then, we have met regularly and spoke a lot. Stepan Stoyko was actively involved in nature conservation, traveled a lot, and published a number of papers, where he summarized his attitude to nature conservation, highlighted the most challenging issues, and shared his opinion on how to address them.

In his late 90s, Stepan Stoyko said that he performed a transition from *Homo sapiens* to *Homo domesticus*, because he stayed at home much more than he used to. However, as he said, that was an excellent occasion to improve his English because he did not feel confident enough in it. He remained very active and, in particular, supported the initiative group Free Svydovets that protected one of the most important biodiversity islands in the Ukrainian Carpathians – Svydovets mountain range. His support was crucial to prevent building the largest Carpathian ski resort and conserve unique mountain old-growth forests, sub-alpine, and alpine grasslands. That is how many of my colleagues, and I remember him. Wise, enthusiastic, and empathic. He was an environmental superhero who worked tirelessly to conserve and protect nature. He was learning every single day, was doing knee push-ups and partial pull-ups to stay fit, used a laptop and Internet in 100 years.

To commemorate his scientific life and contributions, the Ukrainian community of botanists and ecologists Dovkolobotanika established Stepan Stoyko Award in the fields of nature conservation and environmental science for undergraduate, graduate and PhD students.

In memoriam – Степан Стойко

Тимур Бедернічек

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22 жовтня цього року, у віці 100 років, помер професор Степан Стойко – видатний український науковець і природоохоронець. До останніх днів він зберіг ясний розум, активно займався природоохоронною роботою, продовжував працювати над науковими публікаціями. Свою останню наукову статтю він опублікував у вересні 2020 року, буквально за місяць до смерті. Упродовж десятків років він працював головним науковим співробітником та завідувачем відділу у Державному природознавчому музеї НАН України та Інституті екології Карпат НАН України. Степан Стойко обґрунтував створення багатьох природоохоронних територій, серед яких Карпатський державний заповідник (згодом Карпатський біосферний заповідник), природний заповідник Розточчя та численні національні природні парки: Карпатський, Щацький, Ужанський, Сколівські Beskidi і Синевир. Після катастрофічних паводків на Закарпатті 1998 та 2001 років, Степан Стойко звернув увагу на проблему суцільних вирубок у лісах Карпат, зокрема незаконних. Маючи понад 90 років він підтримував ініціативну групу “Free Svydovets”, яка захищала важливий осередок біорізноманіття в Українських Карпатах – Свидовецький гірський масив. Його підтримка була вкрай важливою і допомогла запобігти будівництву найбільшого у Карпатах гірськолижного курорту, а також зберегти приполюнні старовікові ліси, субальпійські та альпійські луки. Я був знайомий із Степаном Стойком понад 20 років, з того часу як мені виповнилось 15. У цій публікації я хочу поділитись власним баченням щодо його внеску в охорону природи та екологію. З метою вшанування світлої пам'яті Степана Стойка та належної оцінки його наукових здобутків українська спільнота ботаніків та екологів “Довколаботаніка” започаткувала Премію Степана Стойка для студентів та аспірантів, які виконують дослідження у галузі охорони довкілля або екології.

Ключові слова: Степан Стойко, Карпати, охорона природи, Премія Степана Стойка