

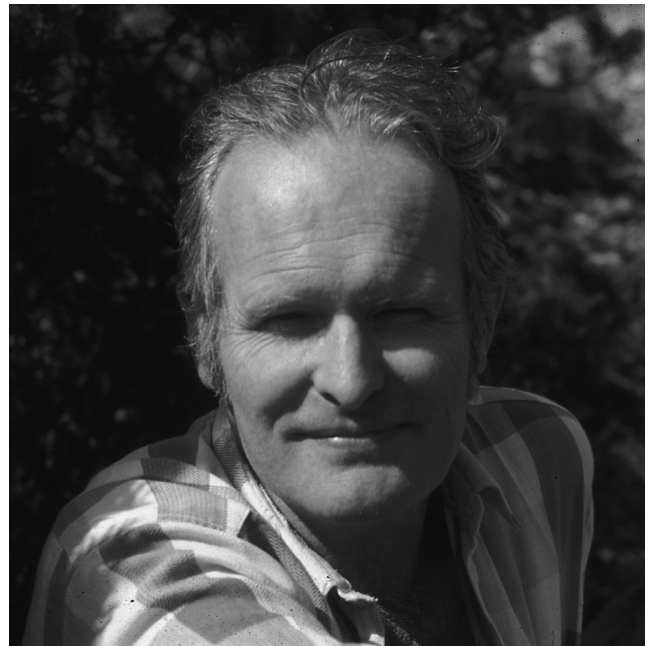
## KONRAD THALER, 1940–2005

European arachnology suffered a tragic loss with the sudden death of Konrad Thaler while leading a student excursion in the Stubai Alps on 11 July 2005, just a few months before he was due to retire.

Konrad was born in Innsbruck on 19 December 1940 and remained loyal to his beloved Tyrolean mountains throughout his life. After school and military service, he began his studies in zoology and botany at the University of Innsbruck in 1959/60. His zoology professors, H. Janetschek and O. Steinböck, were leading authorities on Alpine biogeography, which served to reinforce Konrad's natural inclinations. He gained much experience and research material during six years spent at the Alpine Research Station in Obergurgl, before becoming an assistant at the University of Innsbruck in 1970. He remained there for the rest of his life, becoming head of the Department of Terrestrial Ecology and Taxonomy in 1983.

Konrad Thaler's first publication, on the arachnids of Lunz, appeared in 1963, and he produced his dissertation, on the spider fauna of northern Tyrol (excluding Linyphiidae), in 1967. As was the case with most of his publications, these concerned the spiders of Austria, but many papers also contained notes on harvestmen. As early as his second publication, in 1966, in a paper on the arachnid fauna of the central East Alps, he seemed to have reached a knowledge of his mission, with the statement: "in spite of the efforts of four generations of arachnologists (Bonnet, 1945: 743) the alpine arachnids need . . . in faunistic-chorological and taxonomic, as also in ecological-coenotic respects, intensive further investigation. At the present time they are listed by partial territory only, and partly in the form of mere lists of species without the necessary information about localities". Already in his third paper (1966, *Fragmenta Faunistica Tirolensia* (I)), he showed his ability to present the exact picture of diagnostic patterns, without confusing the issue with unnecessary detail. This paper (as with parts 2–18 of "*Fragmenta Faunistica Tirolensia*") also contained information about other groups of animals, including diplopods, insects and isopods, demonstrating the breadth of his knowledge. The reprints of part 17 of this series were posted on the day of his death, and part 18 was published posthumously with a sympathetic epilogue by Prof. G. Gaertner. In the *Fragmenta* he paid particular attention to the Diplopoda and to the Tyrolean literature on the groups he covered. Konrad also worked on the taxonomy of Diplopoda, and was frequently contacted as an experienced specialist for the determination of problematic specimens. In collaboration with his colleagues E. Meyer and W. Schedl, he organised the 8th International Congress of Myriapodology in Innsbruck in 1990 and edited the Proceedings. Full details of Konrad's work on Myriapoda are given in a tribute by J. Gruber (2007) in *Schubartiana* No. 2: 57–62.

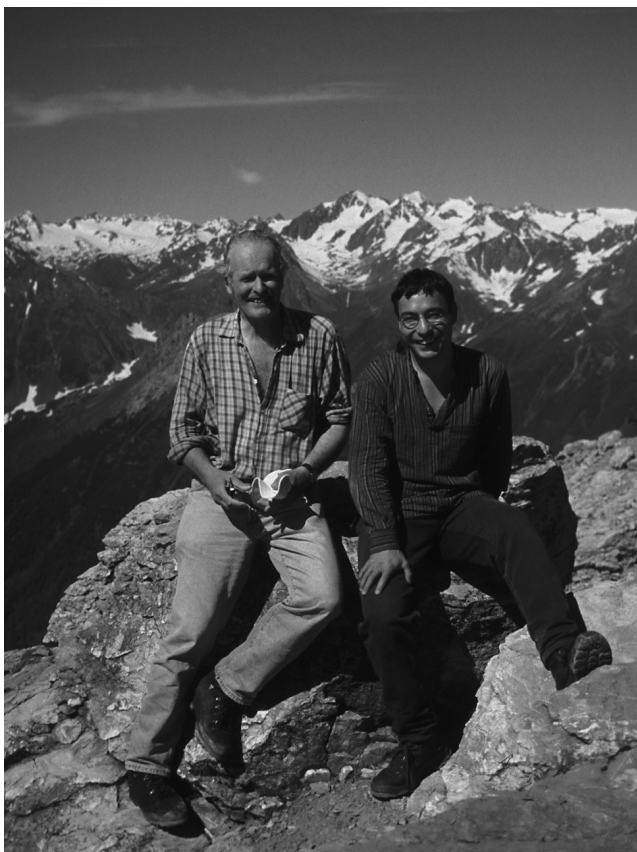
In arachnology, Konrad Thaler concentrated above all on taxonomic research into one of the relatively difficult spider groups, the Linyphiidae, and especially



he acquired a wide knowledge of the subfamily Erigoninae. The simple form of the female epigyne sometimes causes difficulty in identification, and for revisional work it is often necessary to collect the more distinctive male. In Alpine conditions males tend to live for only a short time, so that many high Alpine excursions were needed to collect them. Of particular note is his series of nine papers with the title "Über einige wenig bekannte Zwergspinnen aus den Alpen" (on poorly known erigonine spiders from the Alps) published in various journals between 1970 and 1993, but there were many other papers with similar titles. From 1973 Konrad described 24 new species in the subfamily Erigoninae, mostly from the Alps but some from other regions, e.g. Greece, Africa and Asia. Although he was able to describe species from anywhere, owing to his comprehensive card-index he preferred his favoured Alps. He also described 18 new species from the subfamily Linyphiinae. As early as 1968 he had published a valuable monograph on the difficult genus *Porrhomma*, which later served as a foundation for the section on the genus in "*Spinnen Mitteleuropas*" (Heimer & Nentwig, 1991). Further monographs concerned the genus *Troglohyphantes* and many species in the large genus *Lepthyphantes* s. lat.

A significant contribution to the study of the Alpine fauna came from 58 localities in the nival zone at altitudes from 2,900–3,500 m. There he found 48 spider species and identified the boundaries between the relict areas of the nival fauna, all made possible by the efficiency and alpinist craft of Konrad Thaler.

The overall results of studies of the alpine spider fauna in numerous papers by all authors have been summarised in a series of papers dealing with different families in turn, first in six papers with the title "Beiträge zur Spinnenfauna von Nordtirol" (1991–1999), then in three papers with his wife Barbara Knoflach as co-author, with the broader title "Zur Faunistik der Spinnen von Österreich (2002–2004)". The latter series was enhanced by Barbara's excellent colour photographs, but



Konrad in his natural habitat, with Christoph Muster in the Stubai Alps.

was unfortunately not completed before Konrad's untimely death. This set of publications on the spiders of Austria was partly begun, but without the photographs, in 1994–1997 in collaboration with J. Buchar with four papers entitled "Die Wolfspinnen von Österreich", and continued with B. Knoflach as first author (and photographs) on "Kugelspinnen und verwandte Familien von Österreich" (1998).

A further summary came in the paper "Die Spinnen von Nordtirol: Faunistische Synopsis" (1998), which contains information about the history of research in the region, the three chorological types characteristic of the region, types of habitat and changes in distribution, including notes on other orders of arachnids, accompanied by three distribution maps.

Very important are many papers in which Konrad Thaler clarified difficult problems of nomenclature and established new synonyms, e.g. *Gonatium corallipes*=*G. paradoxum*, *Trichoncus kulczynskii*=*T. auritus*, *Clubiona dvoraki*=*C. saxatilis*, and *Lathys bifoveolata*=*L. nielsenii*. Frequently it was a complicated matter of con-

fusion of records under two valid names, e.g. *Larinioides folium* and *L. cornutus*, *Alopecosa mariae* and *A. striatipes*, *Acantholycosa pyrenaica* and *A. rupicola*, etc.

In addition to taxonomy, faunistics and zoogeography, Konrad also directed his efforts at various ecological problems, e.g. adventive species, myrmecophilous, cave, peatland and xerothermic spiders. He studied spider communities of floodplain forest and secondary habitats as well as communities of montane forest and alpine meadows.

Konrad Thaler has also contributed to our knowledge of the spider fauna in many other countries, e.g. the Amaurobiidae from Greece (with his wife Barbara), the Gnaphosidae from Crete (with M. Chatzaki and M. Mylonas), the Lycosidae from Greece and the Caucasus (with J. Buchar), the Philodromidae from the Mediterranean (with C. Muster) and Swiss species of the genus *Harpactocrates* (with L. Madlener). Other important papers include his comprehensive study of the ecology and distribution of spiders and harvestmen in the Lower Engadine, Switzerland (1995), and his study with R. Maurer of endemism in the spider fauna of the Maritime Alps in France (1988). In many publications he showed his profound knowledge of the history of arachnological research in Europe, and demonstrated his reverence for others in his generous tributes to the life and work of Prof. P. Brignoli (2000) and Prof. H. Janetschek (1997).

Altogether Konrad was the author or co-author of over 270 published papers. He described two new genera and 79 new spider species, 48 of which he collected himself, and one genus and 34 species from various groups have been named in his honour.

At the University of Innsbruck, Konrad supervised many research projects, including 11 doctorates, and assisted many people, both visitors to Innsbruck and arachnologists throughout the world who have expressed thanks to him in their publications for his valuable advice. He had a remarkable capacity to help and inspire people through his discreet approach to problems, as well as in his position of President of CIDA from 1986–1989. He was also the Austrian correspondent of CIDA (and ISA) from 1980–2004, and President of the Austrian Entomological Society from 2002–2005.

Complete bibliographies of Konrad Thaler's publications have been provided by C. Muster (2005) in *Arachnol. Mitt.* **30**: 1–12 and by W. Schedl & E. Meyer (2005) in *Ber. naturw.-med. Ver. Innsbruck* **92**: 397–415.

Many thanks to Barbara Knoflach-Thaler for supplying the photographs of Konrad.

Jan Buchar and Peter Merrett