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In Memoriam: Zygmunt Bocheński (1935–2009)

Author: Elzanowski, Andrzej

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Zygmunt Bocheński (1935–2009)

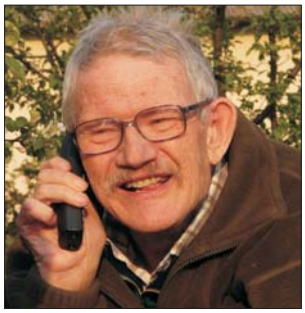


Photo by Agata Szczepańska 2009

Professor Zygmunt M. Bocheński passed away on November 28th, 2009, at the age of 74. His death is deeply felt throughout the international community of avian palaeontologists and European ornithologists.

Zygmunt Bocheński was born on July 25th, 1935 to a couple of known art historians living in Cracow, Zbigniew Bocheński and Anna Misiąg-Bocheńska. Zygmunt Bocheński graduated with a Master's degree from the Jagiellonian University in 1957. He obtained his Ph.D. in 1961, passed his habilitation (in Poland, an evaluation procedure leading to a higher academic degree and tenure) in 1974, and obtained Poland's top academic degree of professor in 1983. From 1959 until his retirement in 2006 he worked in the Institute of Systematics and Evolution of Animals (formerly known under five other names) of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) in Cracow (for one term as its deputy director for science).

Professor Bocheński generously served the ornithological and zoological community throughout his career, primarily as the Editor-in-Chief (1985–2007) of Acta Zoologica Cracoviensia. He co-founded the Ornithological Division of the Polish Zoological Society and was a charter member of the Society for Avian Paleontology and Evolution (SAPE), a successful organization that integrates avian paleontologists and morphologists. He also was appointed to the Committee of Quaternary Palaeogeography of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (PAU). Professor Bocheński earned one of Poland's most prestigious honors, the Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta.

From his early childhood on, Zygmunt Bocheński suffered from a motoric disability (he spent the last 15 years of his life in a wheel chair) that did not discourage him from following his passion for ornithology. He has become well known as an ornithologist and avian paleontologist. He authored and co-authored over 170 publications including nearly 80 full papers and monographs on three major themes: fossil, primarily Quaternary and Tertiary and subfossil (Holocene) birds from Poland and other areas (Spain, Bulgaria, Moldavia, Ukraine, Egypt, Iraq, Spitsbergen, Korea, Antarctica), nesting biology of middle European birds (grebes, gulls and terns, *Turdus* thrushes, penduline tits, *Sylvia* warblers, *Acrocephalus* warblers, bullfinches), and ecological faunistics.

While his studies of extant birds provided a wealth of solid data that are widely used in taxonomic and regional monographs, Zygmunt Bocheński earned his international renown as an avian palaeontologist and archaeozoologist. His 1974 monograph on the *Birds of the Younger Quaternary of Poland* has become a basic reference for all subsequent studies of coeval avian remains in Europe. He described and co-described five new species of fossil birds. Professor Bocheński's long-term interest in unearthing the history of modern bird faunas inspired him to start writing the book on the history of Polish bird fauna (the book was left unfinished at the time of his death). At the same time, his extensive palaeofaunal studies greatly contributed to paleoecological and paleobiogeographic reconstructions of the late Quaternary of Europe. Some of Professor Bocheński's important works on fossil and subfossil birds were done in collaboration with his junior colleague, Dr. hab. Teresa Tomek and his son, Dr. hab. Zbigniew Bocheński (recently appointed Director of the Institute) who successfully continues his father's work on fossil birds and osteological collection. Both intend to complete Professor Bocheński's unfinished book.

One of Professor Bocheński's most significant contributions to science is the osteological collection of birds, at present of about 5000 catalogued specimens, in the Institute of Systematics and Evolution of Animals, that he started in the sixties when preparing his 1974 milestone monograph of late Quaternary birds. This is the only major collection of avian skeletons in Poland and one of the richest in east-central Europe.

Professor Bocheński is survived by his wife Wanda, sons Krzysztof and Zbigniew, daughter Joanna, and five grandchildren.

Andrzej Elżanowski, Museum and Institute of Zoology, Polish Academy of Sciences, ul. Wilcza 64, PL-00-679 Warszawa, Poland.

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