

Stefan Vogel (1925–2015)

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Stefan Vogel (1925–2015)

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Stefan Vogel, aged 90, passed away on 5 November 2015 in his home in Maria Enzersdorf in Austria. He was a world authority in floral ecology, the discoverer of two new classes of pollinator rewards, floral perfumes and fatty oils, and a researcher who put forward new interpretations for the evolution of special flower syndromes. For three years, SV was full professor (C 4) at the Institute for Systematic Botany and Plant Geography of the Freie Universität Berlin, a period stressed in this short obituary. For a more complete evaluation of his life and work, in particular his many more years at Vienna University, see other obituaries (Weber & Pfosser 2015; Weber 2016).

Born in Dresden in Germany on 4 April 1925 as the last child of Dr jur. Wilhelm Vogel and his wife Marianne, née Hauptmann SV developed an early interest in botany and started to prepare plant illustrations at the age of seven. He passed his *Abitur* at the Humanistisches Gymnasium Vitzthum in Dresden in 1944 and was immediately enlisted by the *Wehrmacht* for service in occupied Poland. Soon declared unfit, SV was allowed to return to Dresden to work as technical draughtsman in an armament factory, where he survived the air raid on his home city in February 1945. After the armistice, SV tried to get enrolled at Halle University, but was first rejected. However, Hermann Meusel, then professor of botany and director of the botanic garden of Halle University, permitted him to secretly attend lectures and courses, before he was formally permitted to begin his studies. In addition, Meusel encouraged SV to continue producing watercolours and to identify plants from the botanic garden. In 1947, two years before the foundation of the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany, SV moved to Mainz University reactivated by the French authorities, which meant changing from the Soviet to the French zone of Germany, where working and living conditions were more favourable. In 1949 SV received his Doctor rerum naturalium degree from Mainz University having submitted a self-conceived doctoral thesis “Farbwechsel und Zeichnungsmuster bei Blüten”



Fig. 1. Stefan Vogel, aged c. 50. – Photograph: Sibylle Vogel.

(Colour change and drawing patterns in flowers). This was published in the following year in a city that was to become important for him only much later – Vienna.

However, the formative event of SV's life was his subsequent one-year stay in South Africa with his fellow student Klaus Stopp from Dresden. Effectively this meant studying flower ecology along a ten-thousand-mile trek, documenting the findings in plant illustrations very true to nature and collecting plants for the botanic garden of Mainz University. Although the concept of floral syndromes was not new, having already been put forward

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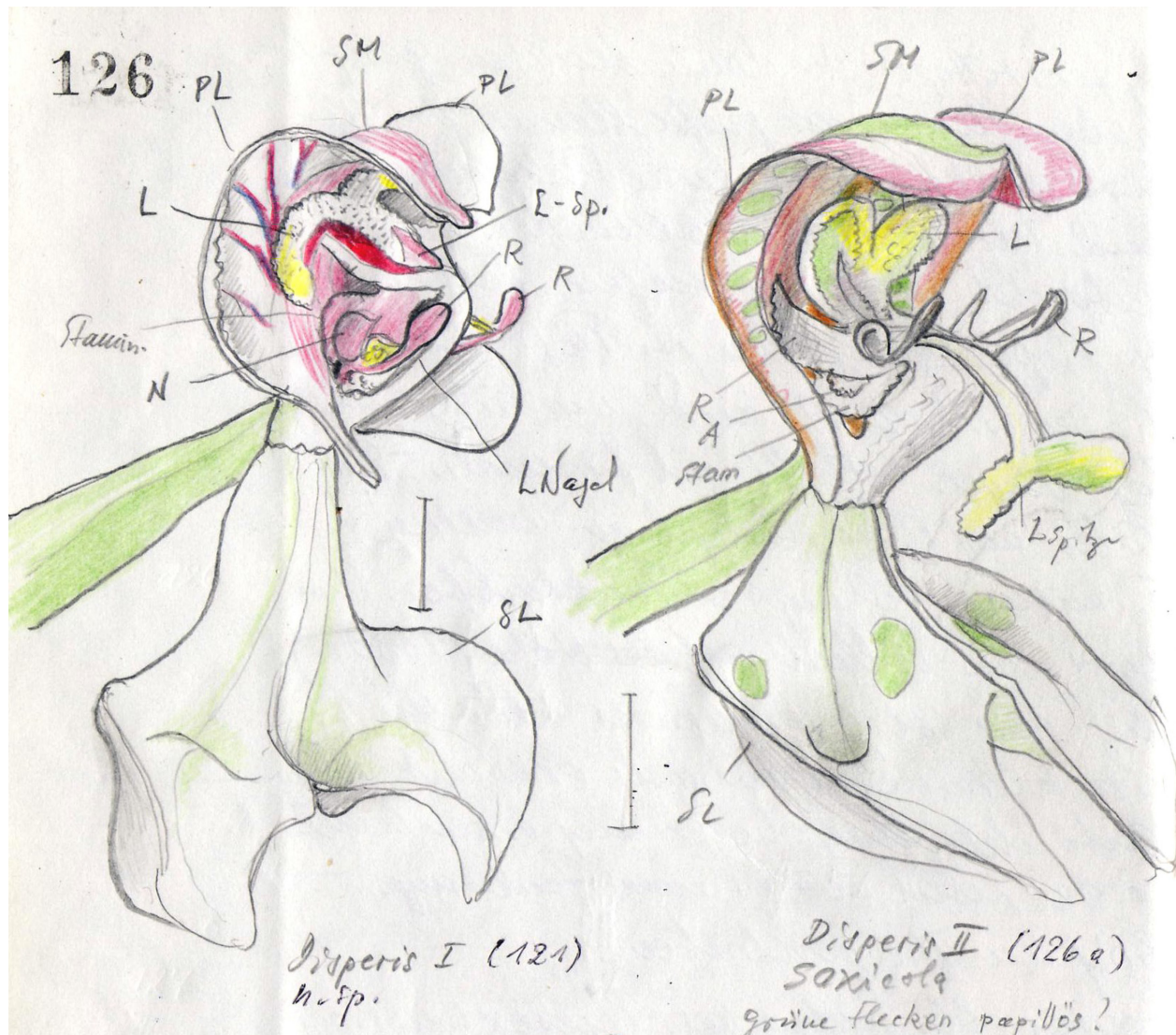


Fig. 2. *Disperis saxicola* Schltr. – Plant illustration by S. Vogel.

by Federico Delpino in Florence many years before, SV applied it for the first time and with rigour to the highly diverse flora of southern Africa. The wealth of observations collected in the field led in 1958 to SV's *Habilitation* at Mainz University with a substantial paper entitled "Organographie der Blüten kapländischer Ophrydeen mit Bemerkungen zum Koadaptationsproblem" (Organography of flowers of *Ophrydeae* from the Cape province with notes on the coadaptation problem). This work subsequently appeared in the publications of the Academy of Science and Literature in Mainz, of which SV became a corresponding member in 1975. Nine years before his election to the Academy he had become civil servant; three years before the election he had been appointed Abteilungsleiter for the field of ecology at the Institute for General Botany of Mainz University.

Always a dedicated field worker, SV left Mainz in 1955 together with H. Sturm for another expedition, this time to South America, which was to last for fourteen months and resulted in the detection of the new category of "perfume flowers", a phenomenon now known in many angiosperms.

During this and his later expeditions SV maintained his habit of preparing very accurate plant illustrations, e.g. of the orchid *Disperis saxicola* Schltr. (Fig. 2), a native of Madagascar. His inclination to botanical illustration is reflected by his part-time teaching activity for this subject at the Werkkunstschule in Wiesbaden, just across the river Rhine from Mainz, which he pursued from 1949 until his move to Berlin. Several more expeditions were to follow, mainly to Central and South America, in particular Brazil, but also to Togo, Cameroon, Malaysia and Borneo. Altogether SV spent more than five years overseas bringing home a rich harvest of observations leading to a long list publications on bat pollination, first observed using a candle and flashbulbs, fungus-gnat flowers, scent-producing structures, floral kettle traps, flickering bodies and several other fields.

In 1963, 1970 and 1972 SV had been invited by the Freie Universität Berlin (FUB) to give guest lectures on

his research in flower ecology. In 1973 he received the offer for a full professorship (B. Rehse, pers. comm., 2016), which he accepted. According to the lecture timetable, SV (Fig. 1) started lecturing at FUB in summer term 1974 and continued until winter term 1976–1977. Three times he gave the then famous *Hauptvorlesung* “Introduction to systematic botany and plant geography”, contributed to the lecture series “Phyla of the plant kingdom” and organized a *Blockpraktikum*, another FUB speciality, in flower ecology. For two terms SV was acting director of the Institute for Systematic Botany and Plant Geography, for two more terms deputy acting director. He was on particularly friendly terms with Theo Eckardt, then the other full professor (C 4) at the institute and, additionally, also director of the Botanic Garden and Botanical Museum Berlin-Dahlem (BGBM), then an institution independent from FUB. The present author recalls musical evenings in Eckardt’s home in Ehrenbergstraße attended by SV. During his three years in Berlin (West), SV published among others on oil-collecting bees and the striking night-flowering *Narcissus viridiflorus* Schousb., a native of Spain and Morocco. In addition, he became for a short while an informal member of the BGBM community occasionally meeting over tea in Eckardt’s office.

Though enjoying excellent conditions for his research work, SV was not happy in Berlin (West), then consisting of the three western sectors of the city surrounded by the infamous Wall. As so often, disharmonies at the institute also played a role. Unsurprisingly he therefore accepted in 1976 a call to take over a full professorship at Vienna University, which went together with Austrian citizenship, though he remained at the same time a German citizen. The present author remembers to what degree SV was impressed by the much more diverse flora of the surroundings of Vienna with its numerous Pannonian and alpine elements and how he enjoyed being able to study them next to his home in Mödling on the southern fringe of the city. However, in his dealings with the Federal Ministry for Science and Research SV was less successful, not taking sufficiently into account the labyrinthine nature of Vienna bureaucracy. Feeling slighted by non-response to his requests, SV decided – after considerable hesitation – to follow an offer for the full professorship of Mainz University, a position that was combined with the directorship of the botanic garden. It meant taking over the chair of his former doctoral supervisor Wilhelm Troll, and so in 1981 SV moved from Austria back to his native Germany. Interrupted only by a Walker Ames guest professorship in Seattle, SV remained in Mainz until retirement.

Freed from his numerous academic commitments at Mainz University in 1990, including the arduous job of acting as referee for the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Council) for five years, SV, aged 65, took the rather unexpected decision to move back to Vienna, where his three children had stayed behind. He bought himself a home in Maria Enzersdorf

near Mödling and again commuted regularly to Vienna, where Rennweg 14, the traditional address of the Botanical Institute, then already renamed Department of Botany and Biodiversity Research, became his permanent base. Very appropriately SV was appointed honorary professor of Vienna University in 1994.

With no official obligations, SV continued to work hard and was fortunate enough to be able to continue for very long. Even in his last decade, i.e. beginning with his eightieth birthday, he produced substantial papers on a wide spectrum of topics ranging from philosophy of science, ant-flower interactions and floral ecology. They included a short paper entitled “A floral biologist’s past fifty years: some thoughts and experiences” which appeared in *Taxon*; excellent reading and at the same time a loving tribute and appreciation of the role of his wife Ilse Vogel, née Schnabel, in his life and work. No attempt is made here to list all of SV’s functions as co-editor of scientific journals, e.g. of *Beiträge zur Biologie der Pflanzen*, and member of the editorial board, e.g. of *Flora*, which he fulfilled for very many years. SV was happy to see in 2012 his seminal work on flower syndromes of 1954 published in an English translation and in 2015 to read the proofs of his very last paper “Vertebrate pollination in *Compositae*: floral syndromes and field observations”, which appeared posthumously in *Stapfia*. This very volume, i.e. *Stapfia* 103, has a very appropriate cover – it shows one of SV’s study objects: a flowering head of *Dendroseris litoralis* Skotts., an endemic of the Juan Fernández Islands, producing copious amounts of nectar, visited by the hummingbird *Sephanoides fernandensis* (P. P. King 1831). In a sense, SV’s only posthumous paper is typical for his entire oeuvre – it is the summary of about 40 years of observation containing carefully selected, convincing illustrations, i.e. photographs taken by him and others in the field, reproductions from the literature as well as line drawings by his own hand.

In this age of impact factors, “managers of science and/or scientists” and big egos measured almost exclusively on the basis of research money attracted and not on achievements in science, SV was a man of a quite different calibre – modest, reserved, very correct, sometimes almost shy, but at the same time a hard-working, dedicated and highly competent person with limited interests outside botany. At the same time he was never distracted by short-lived scientific fashions and always disliked standing in the spotlight. It has rightly been said that “he loved to work, write and draw alone” (Weber 2016). Guided by unusually perceptive and observational skills, SV simply loved working in the field and publishing the results in often very substantial contributions. It is the sum total of his field studies that made him such a highly respected representative of his discipline, well known to botanists and zoologists alike, although many will regret that he did not synthesize his vast knowledge and experience into a text- or handbook on floral ecology. W. Barthlott (Bonn), who had known SV since 1974 when they

were both professors at FUB, told the present author that “every conversation with him [SV] with his encyclopaedic knowledge and phenomenal memory was surprising and profitable. Starting from 1990 our dialogue was intensified since we were both members of the Academy of Science and Literature in Mainz: during each session we exchanged pergamine envelopes with slides in order to inform each other about our new findings in the fields of common interest. ... In SV I have lost one of my most important mentors” (W. Barthlott, pers. comm., 2015). To this statement many, not only floral ecologists, will concur. When the present author by chance met SV in his penultimate year at the Rennweg train station in Vienna, he had not changed at all – a kind, polite man, very much to the point, not complaining about old age and as always interested in developments in the focal point of his life – botany. This is how I shall remember him.

Lists of publications by Stefan Vogel

See Weber & Sonntag (2006) and Weber (2016).

Bioprofile

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Acknowledgements

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