

## OBITUARY – JÁNOS VARGA



On the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2016 János Varga, professor at Szeged University, Hungary, and editor of the World Mycotoxin Journal passed away. He had been taken to hospital at the beginning of May after a stroke and did not regain his consciousness. János was buried on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July in the presence of his family, friends and many colleagues.

János was born on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November 1961 in Dorog, a small city some 38 kilometers from Budapest in Hungary. After finishing secondary school he moved to Szeged, where he stayed for most of his academic life at what was first the Attila József University and since 2000 is the University of Szeged.

In 1986 János Varga obtained his MSc degree in Biology and in 1990 he obtained his PhD degree under the supervision of Lajos Ferenczy and Ferenc Kevei. Later János commemorated his former supervisors by naming two *Aspergillus* species after them. At that time János' work focused on interspecific hybrids and mitochondria typing in *Aspergillus*. In 1991 he obtained a position as research assistant at the university and he broadened his focus by applying many of the then new molecular techniques. In 1989 János was promoted to research fellow and to associate professor in 2008. Last year he was appointed as full professor in Szeged and his working area grew with him.

During his career János spent some months in Jim Croft's lab at the department of Genetics at the University of Birmingham, UK and at the department of Genetics, Wageningen University, the Netherlands working on the genetics of model organisms *Aspergillus nidulans* and *Aspergillus niger*. The longest time he stayed abroad was at the CBS-KNAW Fungal Biodiversity Centre in Utrecht, the Netherlands, where János worked in Rob Samson's group in the period 2007-2009 on *Aspergilli* and *Penicillia* and where he had an enormous output in publications.

The main focus of János Varga's work was always on *Aspergillus*, the genus in which he (co)described 33 new species. But he also worked on various topics from mycotoxins to mycoviruses. Besides *Aspergillus*, he worked on many other model organisms and plant pathogens. He gave courses at university on general and molecular microbiology, advanced experimental mycology, fungal life cycles, mycotoxins, and extrachromosomal genetic

elements of microbes. He trained many students in his laboratory. From 1988, when he published his first paper, he wrote over 400 Hungarian and international papers and book chapters.

The first time I met János was at my first international meeting as starting PhD student. At the FEMS/BMS meeting on *Aspergillus* in Canterbury, UK in April 1993, we had our first drinks together and spoke about topics as virus transmission in fungal species that were still mostly considered to be asexual. It was always a pleasure to work with János, while over the years we gained more knowledge about cryptic mycoviruses and learned that some *Aspergillus* species proved to be sexual after all. I will

miss him as the fantastic collaborator that he was, but value him also for the students trained in his lab that I have been collaborating with.

Bigger of course is the loss for his lab, his students, his direct colleagues and his friends. But especially for his wife, kids Zsófi and Tamás, and the rest of his family, the loss is enormous. János' untimely death will put an end to many 'mycotoxin parties' organised at the weekends.

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