

Professor Dr Paolo Marcello Brignoli, 1942-1986

Last year, Arachnology had suffered a tremendous loss: the death of Paolo Brignoli, one of the most brilliant and prestigious minds of Italian zoology, whose fame has long extended beyond the borders of his own country. Paolo Marcello Brignoli inherited a penchant and love for rigorous classical and historical studies, as well as a faculty for language learning, from his parents. During his youth, however, he discovered that his true calling was for the natural sciences. He studied at the University of Rome where, in 1965, he took his degree in natural sciences, discussing an esteemed thesis on myrmecomorph spiders.

In 1966, he became assistant professor of Zoology at the University of Rome; in 1974, at just 32 years of age, he was awarded a full professorship. On offer of the University of L'Aquila he first became Director of the Institute of Zoology and, later, he was promoted to Head of the Department of Biology and lastly, in 1980, to Dean of the School of Mathematics, Physics and Natural Sciences.

An acute and thorough scholar with a prodigious capacity for analysis and synthesis, in just twenty years of scientific activity he produced an impressive number of publications (over 200). His research encompasses nearly all known groups of arachnids; from the Order Araneida, his favourite group, to the Acari, the Ricinulei, the Palpigradi, the Schizomida, the Opilionida and the Amblypygi. Though young he was unanimously considered to be one of the few arachnologists capable of studying any family of spiders from any region of the world.

His scientific interests centred on three principal areas: evolutionary systematics, taxonomy, and biogeographical and faunal research.

In the first area he made fundamental contributions relating to the importance of male and female reproductive organs as a taxonomic character of various groups of spiders. Moreover, he was the first to illustrate the morphology of female internal reproductive organs in many families of Haplogynae, pointing out their significance in evolutionary terms.

In the second area, Paolo Brignoli's scientific activity may be summarised by the following figures: 23 new genera and 367 new species belonging to 33 families of spiders, schizomids and ricinuleids. One may also mention the painstaking bibliographical research which led to the publication, in 1983, of the Supplement to the *Katalog der Araneae* by C. F. Roewer, in which he lists (in approximately 700 pages) over 7000 species of spiders described since 1940.

The third area of research presents the most conspicuous number of publications: approximately 136 works are dedicated to faunistic studies. Of these, 90 concern the Palearctic fauna, 22 the Australian, 9 the Ethiopian and 10 the Neotropical fauna. His biogeographical studies were chiefly conducted in the Mediterranean region. He also published a catalogue of Italian cave-dwelling spiders and several biogeographical syntheses on cave-dwelling species.



In addition to his scholarship in the laboratory, Paolo M. Brignoli was an exceptional field researcher. His many worldwide expeditions helped to broaden the horizons of biological research in Italy. At the outset of his scientific career, from 1964 to 1973, his collecting was largely conducted in Italy. But from 1966 to 1979 his curiosity also took him to the Near East; from 1973 to 1978 African spiders were added to his collection. From 1979 until shortly before his premature departure, Paolo Brignoli dedicated himself to the promotion of a vast research programme for which he collected in nearly all the countries between Sri Lanka and French Polynesia, and, albeit with less rigour, in various Central and South American countries.

The goal of this research was mainly faunal and biogeographical studies of spiders in the Indo-Australian region. Thereafter, struck by the intensity of the environmental degradation caused by human factors in tropical countries, he undertook specific research in order to compare the arachnofauna of disturbed and undisturbed tropical environments. His fundamental goal was to contribute to the restoration of such environments.

Paolo M. Brignoli was able to study only a very small part of the material collected during the course of these expeditions; the task of continuing his research awaits the attention of other arachnologists.

Born in Rome on 25th April 1942, he had only recently turned forty. He died in L'Aquila, at the end of an intensive day of work, on the evening of 8th July 1986.

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