

## In Memoriam PETER LENK (26 March 1964 – 23 November 2005)

It is really hard to find words for an obituary for a friend who has left us far too prematurely. But PETER LENK deserves to be remembered long into the future.

I first made PETER's acquaintance soon after I had begun tutoring at the Technical University of Darmstadt in the late 1980's. Lower Franconian by birth, he had originally studied landscaping at the TU Munich, and then switched to biology in Darmstadt. He was an enthusiastic terrarium keeper and field herpetologist, and dragonflies were his second passionate focus.

As the subject of his dissertation, we selected a comparative study of the population genetics of the Aesculapian snake, *Elaphe longissima* (now *Zamenis longissimus*), from throughout its range. One of the enduring results of this research was the realization that the southern Italian Aesculapian snake was a separate species, *Elaphe lineata* (today *Zamenis lineatus*).

While working in my laboratory, PETER met a young graphic designer who was completing her practicum at the Hessian State Museum in 1991. It must have been love at first sight. SABINE and PETER made a handsome and very harmonious couple and were married in 1995.

PETER worked on his doctoral thesis at the Institute for Pharmacology and Molecular Biotechnology in Heidelberg. He participated in a research project on the phylogeography of European reptiles that was headed by MICHAEL WINK and myself. His part of the project focussed on the intraspecific differentiation of the European pond turtle, *Emys orbicularis*.

PETER was a perfectionist who always remained open to criticism. His methodological flexibility was remarkable. Not only did he adapt the complex methods of statistical



analysis he had been trained in during a stay with ROGER THORPE in Bangor (Wales/UK), he also worked out an innovative RNA-RNA hybridisation method that would permit the identification of genetic haplotypes. As a man of many interests, PETER also contributed to other projects: he established a DNA family tree for the viperids, and he substituted for me in a research trip to Vietnam in a joint effort with our Russian colleagues, NATALIA ANANJEVA and NIKOLAI ORLOV. It was an adventurous field trip, with PETER's leg being pierced by an arrow that, although not poisoned, caused a wound that healed badly. Moreover he was infected with Malaria. PETER graduated summa cum laude in 1997, and

his work on the European pond turtle can be considered as trail blazing. As recently as 2004, UWE FRITZ used it as a basis for the definition of a new species, *Emys trinacris*, from Sicily and Calabria.

PETER was also a nature conservation activist and contributed to the establishment of a Red List for the amphibians and reptiles of Bavaria. After his relocation to Kahl am Main, he became a founding member of the Workgroup Amphibian and Reptile Conservation in Hesse (AGAR), later becoming a member of its board. He was a critical thinker who often wanted all the details before he would approve of a project. The popular claim of Hessian nature activists that surviving autochthonous pond turtles had been found in the Rhine/Main region was criticised by him as not sufficiently proven.

Fate hit PETER hard after Christmas of 1999. Having meanwhile become a father of two and working in a postdoctoral position at Aventis Pharma in Frankfurt/M., he was diagnosed with a brain tumour. The following years were a constant alternation between phases of recovery and hope for complete convalescence and ever recurring periods of deterioration. Surgery failed to completely remove the tumorous tissue, and chemo- and radiotherapies only managed to stabilize its growth temporarily. PETER fought his disease, lived his life with his family, worked as a bioinformatics specialist at Aventis, and kept on publishing.

His last personally authored publication, on the discovery of a parthenogenetic monitor lizard, appeared two weeks after his death on 23 November 2005. A paper on the area-determining effect of insolation that was intended for the proceedings of the symposium on "Ranges and Distribution Patterns" of the DGHT Workgroup Field Herpetology in 2006, remained a nearly completed manuscript. PETER was also a co-author of the paper "Phylogeographie, Artbildung und postpleistozäne Einwanderung mitteleuropäischer Reptilien" that was published in the same proceedings volume.

With PETER LENK we have lost a very

special person. We will miss his humour, his multifaceted knowledge, his uncompromising love for truth, and even his usually justified criticism. His friends will not forget him.

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