

IN MEMORIAM**Prof. Dr rer. nat. Gerhard Wagenitz (1927–2017)**

Prof. Gerhard Wagenitz passed away on 30 January 2017 whilst convalescing with his eldest son at Geisenheim; he had bronchitis since the New Year.



Gerhard Wagenitz during a one-day excursion in the vicinity of Witzenhausen, ca. 50 km from Göttingen, together with Daisy Cárate Tandalla, ecologist and Asteraceae systematist from Ecuador and Marc Appelhans, Curator of the Herbarium, University of Göttingen (photo taken by Sirinya Somching on 28 June 2015).

Born in 1927, Gerhard Wagenitz studied biology, physics and chemistry at Humboldt University, Berlin and the Georg August University in Göttingen. His doctoral degree from Göttingen in 1955 was awarded for a work entitled “Pollen morphology and systematics in the genus *Centaurea*” which was published in *Flora* (Vol. 142) the same year, and remains a standard work of reference. In connection with his study on *Centaurea* he had worked nine months in Vienna with Prof. Karl-Heinz Rechinger before he went to Berlin where he stayed from 1956 to 1969. He was a scientific

assistant at the Institute of Systematic Botany and Plant Geography (Free University of Berlin), and from 1958 employed as scientific curator at the Botanic Garden and Botanical Museum (Berlin-Dahlem). He took his habilitation in 1962 and a year later, published “The inclusion of the *Phaeopappus* taxa in the classification of *Centaurea*”. In 1966 he was appointed extraordinary professor and in 1969 took the post as professor of Systematic Botany at the Systematic and Geobotanical Institute of the Georg August University in Göttingen where he stayed for 24 years till his retirement in 1993.



Centaurea wagenitziana Bancheva & Kit Tan (described in 2009, photo by Svetlana Bancheva).

In 1982 he was appointed full member of the Academy of Sciences in Göttingen and in 2007, honorary member of the German Botanical Society. A Festschrift commemorating his 60th birthday was published in 1987 (*Bot. Jahrb. Syst.* 108: 145-535).

His scientific interests in morphology, terminology, anatomy of flowering plants and the history of botany led to several publications including the well-known "Dictionary of Botany". He was the leader of the Hegi-group, processing for *ca.* 40 years, the raw material of Hegi's multi-volume "Illustrated Flora of Central Europe", affectionately known as 'Hegi'. He is recognized as one of the leading plant systematists on the genus *Centaurea* and numerous publications have resulted from this and allied subjects.

He embraced computer technology with great enthusiasm and devised programmes to deal with the large amounts of botanical data he had accumulated over the years. He was an ideal teacher and supervised many diploma students and doctoral candidates who all have happy memories of him.

Our last correspondence was on 14 January. He was cheerful and upbeat with access to his computer, internet and work files and I had expected him to make a complete recovery from his bronchial attack. While passing near Göttingen in 2016 I had posted him several interesting specimens belonging to *Centaurea* sect. *Acrolophus*, a group he found particularly difficult and challenging. He noted the postmark and gently reproved me for not availing myself of his kind hospitality at his home in Ewaldstrasse but had sought the anonymity of a nearby post office to communicate. And that is how I wish to remember him – a distinguished, gentle, kindly and unassuming person who has devoted his life to botanical science, generous in sharing his abundant knowledge, modest and humble regarding his own great merits. His achievements could not be imitated except through intelligence, sheer diligence and hard work, thus he had no botanical enemies who could be jealous or envious of his scientific output as is so often the case. All his colleagues without exception, liked and respected him. Like Rupert Barneby from the New York Botanical Garden, he was a taxonomist's taxonomist. And that is surely the greatest botanical accolade one can give.

His devoted wife Ruth passed away in 2007 but he is survived by and dearly loved by his three sons Jürgen, Karsten and Uwe together with their families. Diligent to the last, his observations on *Centaurea adami* and *C. solstitialis* are published in this journal on p. 140, and in the next issue, his latest Synopsis on the *Centaurea Acrolophus* group in the Prespa region will be edited and posthumously published.

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