



Michael Kosztarab

July 7, 1927 - September 6, 2022

Dr. Michael Kosztarab, 95, Professor Emeritus of Entomology, died on September 6, 2022 in Blacksburg, VA.

Dr. Kosztarab was born in 1927 in Bucharest, Romania, grew up in the Transylvanian portion of what was then Hungary, and later resided in Budapest. In 1944 at the age of 17 he helped hide 30 Jews from the Nazis, which resulted in his arrest until the Allied Forces pushed the Nazis out of Hungary. In 1956, he was an associate professor of entomology in Budapest when the Hungarian Revolution occurred. As the Soviets were brutally suppressing the uprising and began to close the Hungarian border, he escaped into Austria with his wife Matilda, a dangerous journey made mostly on foot, culminating in crossing a frigid river into Austrian territory. It was too risky to take their six-month old daughter Eva across the guarded border, so instead they devised a plan to retrieve her. Each day for nine days he traveled on an Austrian train that crossed into a small portion of Hungary. On the ninth day, in a pre-arranged covert transfer, his daughter was passed to him through an open window of the train as it was leaving the Hungarian station while the armed guards were not looking. In 1957, the now-united family immigrated to America with sponsorship by Catholic Charities. These exciting adventures, as well as his time thereafter in the US and his many travels around the world are captured in his auto-biography "Transylvanian Roots."

After arriving in the U.S. and completing his PhD at Ohio State, Dr. Kosztarab became a professor of entomology at Virginia Tech from 1962 until his

retirement in 1992. During his tenure at Virginia Tech, Dr. Kosztarab authored or co-authored 6 books, 170 research publications, 34 research bulletins, and discovered several new insect species. Dr. Kosztarab loved to teach and advised many doctoral and masters candidates at Virginia Tech. His teaching skills were recognized with the W. E. Wine Award for Excellence of Teaching (1968). He also served as the curator until 2003 of the largest and oldest insect collection in Virginia containing over 1.1 million specimens. Dr. Kosztarab was a Founding Director of the Virginia Tech Museum of Natural History established in 1990 and served as Founding President of the Virginia Natural History Society (1993-94). With the aid of the Virginia Federation of Garden Clubs, he led the effort that resulted in the adoption of the Tiger Swallowtail Butterfly as the Virginia State Insect.

The Association of Systematics Collections' Annual Recognition Award was given to Dr. Kosztarab in 1994 for his successful ten-year long effort toward the initiation of the U.S. National Biological Survey/Service. He received the Thomas Jefferson Medal for Outstanding Contributions to Natural Science from the Virginia Museum of Natural History Foundation in 1998; and the L.O. Howard Distinguished Achievement Award of the Eastern Branch, Entomological Society of America in 2001. He was honored with membership in Washington D.C.'s Cosmos Club in 1970 and fellowship in the Royal Entomological Society of London in 1989.

Dr. Kosztarab has been a member of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Blacksburg since 1965. He loved to travel around the world, often to research stations where he collected insects with his wife Matilda who assisted his efforts. With an undergraduate degree in horticulture, he was an avid gardener and even grew grapes in his backyard from which he made homemade wine.

He was the only child of Mihaly Kosztarab and Berta Albert, both of whom are deceased. His wife Matilda Kosztarab predeceased him in 2013. He is survived by his daughter Eva Kosztarab, son-in-law Kenneth Kastner, grandsons Gregory and Matthew Kastner, granddaughter-in-law Katharine

Hagen, and great granddaughters Lia and Abigail Kastner.

A memorial service will be held at St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Blacksburg at 1205 Old Mill Road with the reception/eulogy at 1:00 PM on Saturday, October 1, followed by Mass at 2 pm. His ashes will be interred at the Westview Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, a donation can be made to the Virginia Tech Foundation for the Michael Kosztarab Entomology Scholarship Endowment Fund (#883546) and sent to 902 Prices Fork Road, Suite 4500, Blacksburg, VA 24060.

Cemetery Details

Westview Cemetery

723 E. Roanoke Street
Blacksburg, VA

Previous Events

Memorial Service

OCT 1. 2:00 PM (ET)

St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church
1205 Old Mill Rd
BLACKSBURG, VA 24060

Tribute Wall

KS

“ Dr. Kosztarab was one of my professors when I joined the Entomology Department at Virginia Tech in June of 1978. I was 18 years old and just graduated high school and starting my very first job. I have very fond memories of him and his sweet wife. He was so kind and patient with me as I learned so many bug names and their spelling. 😊. He brought me candy every week. Such a kind man. The world was a better place to have him in it. Love and prayers to the family. ❤️🙏

Karen Snider - October 02, 2022 at 09:03 PM

GP

“ Dea Eva and family, I had the opportunity to know your father and mother several years ago, at my first ISSIS meetings in Naples. I was a beginner in scale insects studies and Michael encouraged me very much sending me many papers. I met him regularly at the following ISSIS meetings until 2007. In 2001, when I organized at my university in Padova (Italy) an ISSIS meeting, they both arrived some days before the opening day, just to help me with the organization. He was so lively, cheerful and unforgettable person and I always remember him with pleasure. Surely he will miss to the whole coccidologists community. Giuseppina Pellizzari

Giuseppina Pellizzari - September 21, 2022 at 05:02 AM

DB

“ *In the middle 1970's, I was one of his graduate students. I did name a new species of scale insect after him. He was certainly the Father of Scale Insect Taxonomy. He helped me change my career from entomology to one in medicine, pharmacology and nursing. I Thank him for that wisdom as the rewards have been many. My condolences to the family. Dr. Ron Baer Ph.D, MSN, CNSD, MS, BSN, RN, MS, BSA.*

Dr. Ron Baer Ph.D, MSN, CNSD, MS, BSN, B - September 18, 2022 at 07:20 AM

NA

“ *Dear Kosztarab family, My heart is with you all. Michael was so full of life and gave so much to his students, community, and those he worked with. Just the plants he gave away are probably now scattered across the country. I can't see a scale insect or a potato beetle without thinking of him and Matilde. He had been on mind lately and I just wrote, but am afraid maybe my card arrived too late for him to see. I'm so sorry. With deepest sympathy, Nancy*

Nancy - September 09, 2022 at 01:58 PM



“ *My prayers and condolences to you Eva and your family.
Sherry Pauley Sonnessa BHS Class of 1973*

Sherry Sonnessa - September 09, 2022 at 09:51 AM