

Professor emeritus Seppo Sulkava (1931–2019)

Seppo Sulkava, professor emeritus of zoology, passed away aged 87 in Espoo, Finland. He was born on 30th September 1931 at Ilmajoki, western Finland. He made an extensive career starting 1961 at a newly formed University of Oulu as a researcher, then as a curator of the Zoological Museum and since 1968 as a professor until retirement 1994, the last seven years as the head of the Department of Zoology.

His versatile ecology research included ecology of birds of prey and small mammals and winter ecology. His main research field was indisputably ecology of birds of prey, especially food biology of almost all species of birds of prey breeding in Finland. He represented the old “German-Dutch raptor school” started by early ecologists like Otto Uttendörfer and Lucas Tinbergen. Raptor ecology was much food research centred at that time. He brought ideas of this school to Finland becoming a pioneering researcher of this field.

His classic study on the Goshawk from 1964 “Zur Nahrungsbiologie des Habichts” (*Aquila ser Zool 1: 1–103*) dealt with among-year variation of the Goshawk’s diet in relation to available main foods (Tetraonids) in western Finland. He validated several correction methods in the prey remain collection. The study also dealt with the dispersal of fledglings. An interesting part of the book was the analysis of the crash of Goshawk population after an extremely cold winter. In Finland, the estimates of small game species, main food of the Goshawk, were available enabling to find causes for the dramatic population collapse of the Goshawk.

In his later works and especially in his teaching, the classic raptor ecology was brought to modern times, where diet composition and selection, prey numbers and breeding success were analysed to increase understanding of badly threatened raptors’ life and future. Species like the Peregrine, Golden eagle and White-tailed eagle became the focus of his research in the 1960’s when these spe-



cies were extremely threatened. He also analysed diets of all owl species breeding in Finland. Persecution of birds of prey was intense until late 1960’s when almost all species were still unprotected. By publishing diets of many birds of prey he could show how harmless owls and most raptors were for small game, creating a basis for future protection laws.

His second main interest was in small mammals. Northern Finland was an ideal study area due to many arctic and subarctic species not found in southern Finland. He developed identification of mammals from bones and hairs including these findings when renovating professor Lauri Siivonen’s book “Mammals of Fennoscandia”. He also wrote a book of winter ecology with professor of botany Paavo Havas “Winter of Finnish Nature” and a book of identification of snow-tracks.

Seppo Sulkava was generally known as a gentleman who always had time for his students much offering his own time for research but never forgetting his absolute sense of duty in daily routine work as the leader of the department. Seppo supervised an innumerable number of theses and inspired many students who became later world widely famous ecologists of birds of prey. He was a hard labourer who continued his beloved work with owl and raptor food analyses literally until the death at his working desk.

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