

## Obituary

### Rudolf Josef Kohout

29 April 1933 – 26 May 2016

Rudolf Kohout (Rudy) has passed, leaving behind an incredible legacy of family, friendships and contributions to the study of ants in general, and his beloved *Polyrhachis* specifically.

On behalf of Rudy's many friends and colleagues, Seiki Yamane and I would like to present this Obituary for Asian Myrmecology, in Rudy's Honour.

I (Seiki) met Rudy for the first time in London in early October, 1994. We were working at the Entomology Department of the Natural History Museum, examining type specimens of ants then being managed by Barry Bolton (Fig. 1). At that time Rudy was a non-registered visitor so that did not have keys for the many doors getting to the Hymenoptera collection room. On Sunday I would wait for him at the museum en-

trance, opening the more than five doors using keys provided for me. Barry Bolton was very kind to both of us and without this chance meeting at the NHM, Rudy's involvement in ANeT may not have come to fruition.

Rudy attended ANeT meetings six times, from the second meeting at the University of Malaysia Sabah in 2000 to the sixth meeting at Patiala, India in 2007. His presence at meetings always encouraged and pleased participants and in particular young people (Fig 2). Every morning he appeared in the meeting room, saying 'Good morning everybody'. I will never forget his sociable face and attitude (Fig 3). Unfortunately, after the sixth meeting he could not attend the meetings due to health problems.



Figure 1. Rudy Kohout, Seiki Yamane and Barry Bolton at the Natural History Museum, London, October 1994.



**Figure 2.** Rudy and Seiki helping students at the 2<sup>nd</sup> ANet Conference in Sabah, November 2000.



**Figure 3.** Rudy relaxing at the 4<sup>th</sup> ANet Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, November 2003, with Tuan Viet Bui, Himender Bharti, Rosli Hashim and John Fellowes



**Figure 4.** Rudy, Carsten Brühl and Simon Robson at the 3<sup>rd</sup> ANeT Conference in Hanoi 2001



**Figure 5.** Rudy receiving the Lifetime Contribution Award at the 6<sup>th</sup> ANeT Meeting Punjabi University, India 2007



**Figure 6.** Rudy and Nawee at Ant Course Australia, Cairns 2001



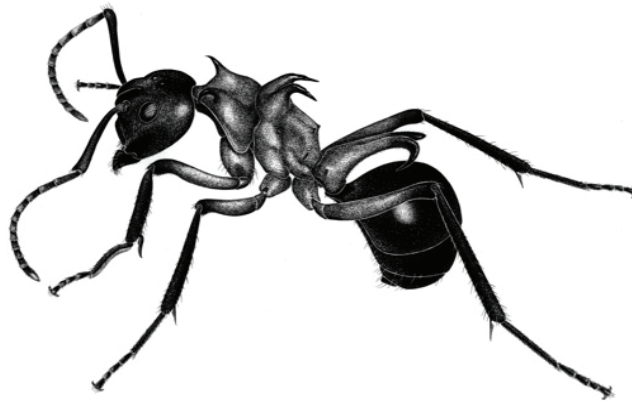
**Figure 7.** Rudy at the strategy meeting planning for Asian Myrmecology, 5<sup>th</sup> ANET meeting University of Malaysia 2005, with Kazuo Ogata (?), Decha Wiwatwitaya and Himender Bharti

Rudy's contribution to myrmecology and science included far more than his detailed and thoughtful taxonomic revisions. Rudy was a valuable resource for the International Network for the Study of Asian Ants (ANeT) a participant in many of their early workshops and field trips (Fig. 4), and a founding Editor of this journal (Asian Myrmecology). Rudy was honoured for his lifetime contribution to the field of myrmecology at the 6<sup>th</sup> ANeT International Conference at the University of Punjab, India in 2007 (Fig. 5). His careful taxonomic papers represented a gold mine of information for those of us interested in evolution and behavior, containing the first descriptions of swimming ants (*P. sokolova*), the parasitic habits of *P. loweryi* and the unique silk weaving and nesting habits of many others (including the pitcher plant nests of *P. nepenthicola*).

Rudy taught myrmecology to many beginners. He informally supervised a Thai student, Nawe Noan-anant, who received his PhD in 2009 with a dissertation treating *Polyrhachis* ants (Fig. 6). At the 5<sup>th</sup> ANeT meeting in Kuala Lumpur Rudy led the discussion to create a new journal, which we now know as Asian Myrmecology (Fig. 7), and continued to provide editorial and

written support. His images of *Polyrhachis* were on the cover of three volumes, and he authored a total of nine articles published in the journal, including the first article in the first volume (describing a new species *Polyrhachis maryatiaae*). A list of Rudy's *Polyrhachis* publications (almost 50!) is provided at the end of this document.

Rudy had a checkered life after having escaped from Prague with his wife Eva and children during the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Details remain unclear but motorbike rides across closing borders were involved. Eventually, they entered Australia as refugees. Arriving first in Adelaide they soon moved to Canberra. Eva continued to teach ballet and Rudy's wonderful illustrator skills (e.g. *Polyrhachis* Fig. 8), landed him a position with Bob Taylor, then Curator of Ants at the Australian National Insect Collection at the CSIRO. When drinking with me he repeated the story of the escape from Prague holding some paintings drawn by his father and difficult life in Australia before getting the permanent position at the Queensland Museum. Initially he could not speak English fluently, the income was small, and the couple was forced to live separately for some period.



**Figure 8.** One of Rudy's many *Polyrhachis* drawings: *Polyrhachis (Polyrhachis) bellicosa*, the only species of this subgenus found in Australia.



**Figure 9.** Rudy preparing an ichthyosaur fossil for display in the Queensland Museum, December 1980.



**Figure 10.** Winner of the Inaugural 1985 Australian Entomology Society Scientific Illustration prize, Rudy's drawing of a jewel beetle (Buprestidae)

In 1974 the family moved north to Queensland where Rudy began work at the Queensland Museum as a Preparator (Fig. 9). His duties were varied but included molding and casting of specimens to be used for display, working on fossils in the field with Mike Archer and operating the freeze dryer. His artistic abilities, which were prodigious, were also often called upon. Because of his insect inclinations Rudy often worked on insects displays and these included casting giant magnetic termite mounds in Cape York Peninsula for the new QM building in 1986 and building dioramas of *Oecophylla* nests and ant plants for the opening of QM's branch museum in Townsville a few years later. Rudy's artistic abilities were recognized in 1985 when he won the Australian Entomological Society's inaugural scientific illustration competition with an exquisite black and white drawing of a jewel beetle (Fig. 10). Most of his spare time, however, was spent working on his beloved *Polyrhachis* ants (the 'birds of paradise' of the ant world, according to Ed Wilson), an interest that began in Canberra with the support of Bob Taylor. After almost 19 years Rudy retired from his prepara-

tor position but he never really left the museum, being immediately appointed as an Honorary Research Associate in the Entomology Section. Owing to the early difficult life and the pressure through ordinary museum work, most of his myrmecological papers were published after his retirement from the museum.

Rudy enjoyed field work. He travelled to every corner of Australia on adventurous field trips in his trusty Landcruiser, and soon expanded north in search of his ants. His first big venture was eight weeks travelling alone in Papua New Guinea in 1984, with later research journeys to mainland SE Asia and Borneo.

Rudy visited Japan once with Eva, starting from Hyogo and Kyoto, guided by Yoshiaki Hashimoto, then coming down to Kagoshima, where Bakhtiar Effendi Yahya from Sabah and Syaokani from Aceh were conducting their PhD work. We visited Chiran to see 'Zero' fighter, which Rudy had wanted to see. Dr. Watanasit and Nawee also joined us in a Samurai garden in Chiran (Fig 11). We talked a lot while enjoying a lot of beer.



**Figure 11.** Rudy and Eva in a Samurai garden, Chiran, Kagoshima. Rear: Eva, Yoshiaki Hashimoto, Rudy. Front: Seiki, Syaokani, Suparock Watanasit, Momoko Isowaki. 2 July 2006.

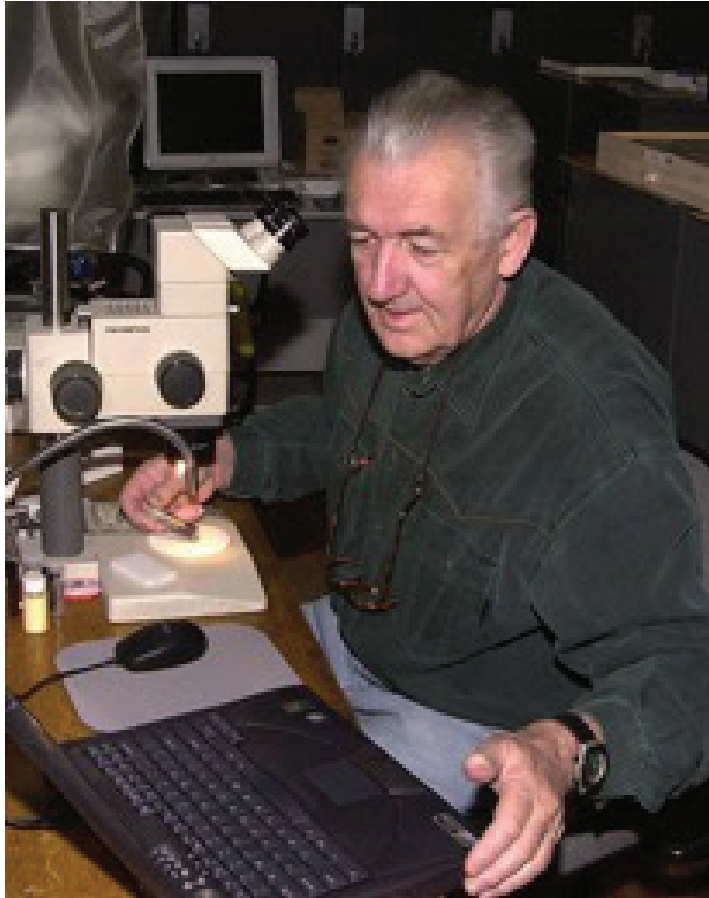


**Figure 12.** Rudy and Simon Robson resting on the back steps in Townsville, before an excellent field trip with Seiki to the top end of Australia in Rudy's Toyota, September 2001.



**Figure 13.** Rudy, Eva and Steve Shattuck at the 17<sup>th</sup> IUSSI International Congress in Cairns Australia 2014.





**Figure 14.** Rudy at work in the Ant Room, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard (Photo courtesy of Gary Alpert).

I (Simon) first met Rudy when I returned to Australia from the US in 1995 with a new PhD in hand. Returning to work on *Polyrhachis*, a group of which I knew very little, I was told by many that I simply had to meet Rudy, who knew everything about them. And so started over 20 years of friendship and science, commencing in Rudy's kitchen in Brisbane with a cup of very strong Lavazza coffee and a plate of Czech cookies made by Eva, his wife.

Rudy provided the world with outstanding clarity in our understanding of the world's 4<sup>th</sup> most species rich ant genus, *Polyrhachis*. Demonstrating a rigorous and fastidious approach to his studies, he expended a considerable time locating and examining type specimens through-

out Europe. He was incredibly generous with his time in assisting others identify their ants and he enjoyed hosting his friends and colleagues when they visited Australia.

It was through Rudy that I really came to appreciate the diversity of the ant genus *Polyrhachis*, and it was through Rudy that I connected with the wonderful ANeT community and with Asian Myrmecology. Rudy and I attended a number of ANeT meetings together and travelled together through northern Australia in search of *Polyrhachis* (Fig 12) and although it became difficult for Rudy to travel internationally, he was able to participate in conferences in Australia up until 2014 (Fig. 13).

The work of most taxonomists continues when they retire, but for Rudy, his output continued to grow. His early work on *Polyrhachis* largely involved setting a stable platform for the taxonomy of the genus. This required examining, and in many cases searching for, the types of previously described species. He corresponded with the curators of a host of European and American collections where the types of Australian species were scattered, and in many cases visited the collections in person. His careful comparison of the types with recently collected specimens was essential to establish which species were described and which were new. In recent years this painstaking work came to fruition with a string of papers describing new species, many published in local journals such as the *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum* and the *Australian Entomologist*. To date Rudy has described over 150 new species of *Polyrhachis* as well as erecting a new subgenus *P. (Hirtomyrma)*. Concentrating on the *Polyrhachis*

of Australia and New Guinea (103 new species described) his work extended into the Pacific, through South-east Asia and even up into Tibet (*P. lama*). His friends and colleagues continue working to complete two significant revisions of *P. (Hedomyrma)* and Bornean *Polyrhachis* on his behalf.

Although Rudy did not have the opportunity to complete a PhD (his work towards an MSc remained in Prague when they were forced to flee), the funding sources that supported his efforts are testament to the esteem with which he was held by fellow scientists. These include the Australian Entomological Society, Australian Research Council, the Australian Biological Resource Survey and The Ernst Mayer Grant from Harvard University (Fig. 14).

When Ben Hoffman described a new species in his honour, *Polyrhachis kohouti*, it was noted by one of Australia's foremost cartoonists Michael Leunig (Fig. 15).



Figure 15. A cartoon by celebrating the description of *Polyrhachis kohouti*



**Figure 16.** Rudy and Eva celebrate on their wedding night in Czechoslovakia

Rudy loved his ants and he loved his Eva and family. We think it fitting that the final photograph in this tribute, be of he and Eva (Fig 16).

He is greatly missed by family and friends.

Simon Robson  
Honorary Professor University of Sydney

Seiki Yamane  
Professor Emeritus Kagoshima University

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