

**To Sandro Pignatti, on the occasion of his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday**



Sandro Pignatti (Venice, 28 September 1930) began his academic career at the University of Pavia where in 1954 - immediately after graduating in Natural Sciences - Prof. Raffaele Ciferri appointed him as assistant. He then continued at the University of Padua, where in 1958 Prof. Carlo Cappelletti proposed him for the post of Systematic Botany. His academic career reached its peak in 1963 at the University of Trieste, where he was called to hold the chair of Botany, and ended at the “La Sapienza” University of Rome, where Sandro Pignatti moved in 1983 to occupy the chair of Plant Ecology, previously held by Valerio Giacomini, his friend and teacher, who died a few years earlier. Academic of the Lincei from 1999, since 2005 Sandro Pignatti is Professor Emeritus at the University of Rome “La Sapienza”.

During his scientific activity, Sandro Pignatti has dealt with various botanical and ecological issues, starting with research on the phanerogamic and cryptogamic flora, to continue with the study of plant associations in various parts of Italy, and ending with the great syntheses mainly represented by the “Flora d’Italia” and “Plant Life of the Dolomites”.

At the beginning of his scientific career, Sandro Pignatti had been sent by Prof. Raffaele Ciferri to Montpellier, for a period of specialization at the phytosociological school of Josias Braun-Blanquet. After Valerio Giacomini and Ruggero Tomaselli, Pignatti was the third botanist from Pavia to go to Montpellier. Returning to Italy, he greatly contributed to the spread of Phytosociology, first in Pavia, then in Padua, Trieste and Rome. His first important phytosociological contribution, dedicated to the vegetation of the eastern Venetian Plain, has now become a classic. His research on flora allowed him to discover and describe many new species and to publish important critical revisions of some genera.

However, already since the years of Padua, Sandro Pignatti was thinking of a great work dedicated to the Italian flora. The last national Flora was that of Adriano Fiori, published between 1924 and 1926, a work which was valid for its time, but had started to appear as outdated, both because of increased floristic and taxonomic knowledge, and because the concept of species had changed considerably with respect of that adopted by Fiori. The monumental *Flora d’Italia* by Sandro Pignatti was published in 1982, in three volumes, by Edagricole of Bologna. A second edition, in four volumes, was published in 2017-2019.

Sandro Pignatti cultivated intensive contacts with other botanists and had many friends among them, both in Italy and abroad. However, beyond personal relationships, he always also had a great commitment for societal activities. In 1961, when he was in Padua, he founded - in collaboration with Erwin Aichinger (Klagenfurt) and Max Wraber (Ljubljana) - the Ostalpin-Dinarische Pflanzesoziologische Gesellschaft based in Padua, giving life to a periodical, the "Mitteilungen", in which the communications presented at congresses organized both in Italy (Bressanone, Camerino and Trieste) and abroad (Zagreb, Zurich, Munich, Ljubljana, Vienna, etc.) were printed. This Association was very important for young Phytosociologists at the beginning of their careers, because they had the opportunity to meet and communicate at congresses, and to publish their first essays on the "Mitteilungen".

A few years later, in 1967, Sandro Pignatti was elected President of the Italian Botanical Society, where he proposed the establishment of working groups, which later became very important for the scientific growth of Italian Botany. In the international field, Sandro Pignatti regularly attended the congresses organized in Rinteln by Prof. R. Tüxen. In this context, he was also elected President of the IAVS (International Association for Vegetation Science). In those years, Sandro Pignatti was very busy both on a scientific and organizational level: every year the annual congress of the IAVS was organized in different states and regions, in Jena, Bailleul, Prague, Utrecht, Palermo and elsewhere. Of particular importance is his role in founding the Working Group for Data Processing within the IAVS, together with E. van der Maarel and L. Orloci. In an era when computers were an absolute novelty, the creation of this group - whose first meeting was held in Trieste in 1969 - was of fundamental importance in the introduction of multivariate analysis techniques in Plant Ecology. Another important fallout of Sandro Pignatti's interest in the new information technologies was the creation of the *Database on the Flora of Italy*, one of the first examples of this kind at an international level, in an era when the Internet did not yet exist.

In Montpellier, Sandro Pignatti had met a young botanist, Erika Wikus, native from Fronsburg (Wien), also a specialist under the guidance of Braun-Blanquet. After a short time, Sandro and Erika got engaged and married. From their marriage 5 children were born: Johannes, Laura, Giuseppe, Eugenio and Francesco. In addition to being a wife, Erika also became a close collaborator of Sandro in the field of vegetation studies, as is clear from their recent works on the Dolomites and on the Western Australian Deserts.

Sandro Pignatti published hundreds of important scientific contributions. The work consulted by all Italian botanists is his *Flora d'Italia*, of which he managed to provide an eagerly awaited update in its recent second edition.

On the occasion of his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, 70 colleagues, students, friends and young botanists of various nationalities gathered in contributing to this volume, wishing Sandro Pignatti to enjoy for a long time the fruits of what he managed to sow during a life dedicated to Botany.

From their respective offices, January 6, 2022

*E. Feoli, F. Garbari, P. L. Nimis, F. Pedrotti, F. M. Raimondo*