

In memory of Piero Baronio (1938 - 2018)

Piero why don't you drop by anymore here at Entomology labs? Piero, born in Cesena on 21 April 1938, passed away on 7 October 2018. Since spring this year Piero had stopped commuting by train (Cesena to Bologna and back) and coming to see us. Retired for many years, he continued to give lessons as an adjunct professor free of charge. Passionate about research and teaching, for him the University and entomology were one and the same thing. When we were in our old premises in via Filippo Re life as a commuter would have been a little less tiring. Following our move to viale Fanin, unfortunately for Piero, in addition to the time spent on the train, around 90 minutes of bus were added to his journey. With his advancing age it was no small sacrifice to arrive at our new building. But his constancy in staying together with us to discuss insects was so great that despite the likely onset of an illness, always kept to himself, he still spent one or two days of the week with us. This routine, even in the summer months, was only interrupted in the central days of August, when also the bus services were drastically reduced! We, in the group of entomologists, began to understand that his absences were a sign that something was wrong.

It is not easy to commemorate a friend and colleague with whom one has spent so much time together. Even though we worked separately, one giving lessons in one room, the other in another, it had become a sort of ritual to have lunch together, with more or less serious discussions but always in a spirit of great cordiality and friendship. The problems of the university, the competitions, the qualifications, the students, the restricted-access problems, the exams, the guide for the students of the faculty, the statute of faculty, etc. Personally I suggested he should forget about this last thing, given the continuous upheavals, in various 'blows', that constantly took place. Today, in fact, the faculty no longer exists! In the end, during these discussions Piero's 'Romagnolity' (his Romagnolo blood) came forth, of a similar 'Fellinian' nature. Everything ended with his ironic phrase: "If it were for me I would take a shot!!" (*una sciupatèda*). I will always keep in my mind another typical phrase, good and valid for all seasons: "*ch'ul sa e' nòn*". Quite simply: if it's very cold it will be cold like our grandfather knows, vice versa if it's very hot, and so on. Whatever the case, our grandfather knows! In summary, it is always the elderly that know everything!

His life as an entomologist officially started in 1968 with his graduate dissertation dealing with research on the topic of aphids: "Research on a sampling method to estimate aphid infestations on apple trees". A work carried out with great diligence that allowed him to obtain the highest marks with distinction. In those days in the Institute there was the director Prof. Maria Matilde Principi and still with us today there was Prof. Guido Grandi. For some years he concentrated on integrated pest management against fruit tree phytophages, then moving to tachinid flies with a specialization school dissertation entitled "Ethology of the tachinid fly *Cyrtophleba ruricola* parasitizing *Apopestes spectrum*".

His passion for these parasitoid insects, their biology and relations with their hosts was such as to keep alive the continuous rearing in the Institute's incubators of a lepidopteran



as a factitious host of some species of tachinid flies. These studies were performed in a small group formed in the Institute with Egidio Mellini and Guido Campadelli. For various periods Piero studied abroad, particularly with his colleague Frantisek Sehnal (Prague). This allowed him to deepen and give an international value to his research. His most recent studies again concerned tachinid flies, after returning to Bologna following other periods spent abroad and then at the University of Tuscia. His highly intense teaching activity, which covered several fields of entomology, did not allow Piero to dedicate himself totally to research. This inevitably affected his scientific output and unlike some authors today who publish an article every 5 days (!) his papers were all carried on with patience and with carefully chosen words. He was equally meticulous with photos and figures. Piero punctiliously re-read his work and always wanted to be perfectly sure about what he was writing. When one is dealing with field work it is, in any case, hard to write 'abundantly'. Piero dedicated himself to various areas of entomology while also following his teaching activity. He had to inform himself and was not interested in slavishly repeating arguments taken from books. His experience was gained by consulting with colleagues who studied forest entomology or the control of foodstuff insects, as well as from what he could glean from friends inside the group of the Institute or from outside. He took part in international groups on the study of forest insects. He won a competition and became tenured as full professor at the University of Tuscia (Viterbo) and then at the *Alma Mater* University of Bologna in November 1994. One of Piero's characteristics was his careful construction of a collection and his constant search for new ways to arrange the library, especially during the move that he had to face at the end of the '90s. If laboratory equipment or even office furniture had to be bought he was always in favour of updating equipment and whatever else was necessary (obviously if funds were available). With Piero as director of the Guido Grandi Institute and in charge of the entomology area of the department, it was necessary to reorganize the whole of the vast collection of insects currently named the 'Guido Grandi insect collection'. Piero was also nominated as Ordinary Academician and then Emeritus of the Italian National Academy of Entomology.



He was, in any case, in no way an academic closed in an ivory tower, even if his appearance might make him seem a baron - as well as his surname (!). Almost every Saturday he used to go with his colleague Guido Campadelli, and other naturalist entomologists from Romagna, on an 'insect hunt' in and around the Apennines or in the pine forests near Ravenna. Among his many entomologist friends, there was often Enrico Zappi. I thank him for the photos that appear here and that he kindly gave us. The few times that I too, as a youngster, joined the entomological forays, I can testify that there was always plenty of fun to be had, but also a lot of walking to do! In the months of the hunting season, Piero also went, as he used to say in dialect, to fire '*una sciuptèda*' - that is, to fire some shots with friends (perhaps more in the air than actually hitting birds!). During his moments of leisure, having obtained a pilot's license when he was young, he was fond of flying. He used to go flying on Sundays. From up high he could certainly see his beloved woodlands of Campigna and of the Valbura valley, the orchards, the farmed fields of the Cesena area and the bulk of the Malatesta fortress and San Marino and the other hills. Like a bird in flight he surveyed 'his' zones of insect hunting. Places that on other days he would have crossed on foot with his entomologist friends, enthusiasts like him. So now Piero, go on!... keep on flying among the clouds. From all of us a heartfelt and shared '*amarcord*', we won't forget you.

Stefano Maini

Personally I always considered Prof. Piero Baronio to be the "Researcher" *par excellence*; in fact, all his days were devoted to study that led him to ask himself ever new "whys". So, working with him meant looking for answers to the "whys", trying to find an explanation for the "facts" observed by passing through all possible routes.

Another distinctive trait of the "Prof." was his relentless academic activity that allowed him to achieve many objectives; not least of all his constructive participation in the birth of the Cesena branch of the ex-Faculty of Agriculture, as well as the creation of the Istituto per la Conservazione e lo Studio dei Materiali Naturalistici della Romagna (the current Natural Science Museum) in Cesena.

This is how I saw the "Prof.", a tireless scholar, always hungry for new things to do, and an authoritative teacher.

Nadia Baldassari

I was deeply and sincerely saddened by the news of the passing of Professor Piero Baronio. His figure had, from the outset, accompanied my steps along the path of entomology, first "in the background", because I wasn't working directly with him, but then in an increasingly closer way, because, from the end of the '90s, I entered the group of his collaborators.

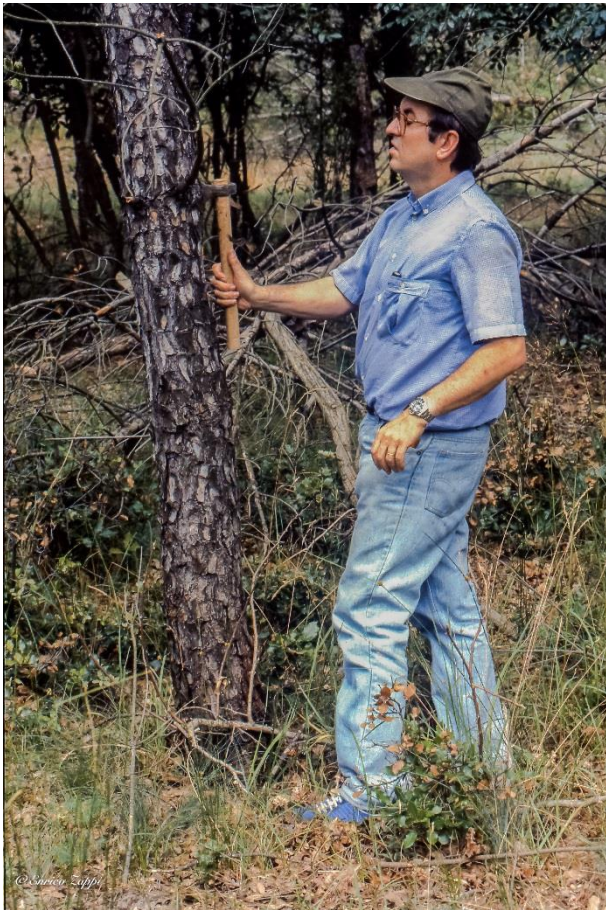
I owe him a debt of gratitude, because he gave me his trust, allowing me to continue my research on Tachinid flies (one of the sectors in which he excelled) and on other subjects, for instance the topical question of exotic insect species. It was thanks to his trust, and to his support, that I was able not to lose faith and to progressively pursue my academic career, despite the fact that, in the meantime, I had also formed a family: I could say that, for Piero, the fact that I was a wife and mother never represented a hindrance or a reason for me to miss opportunities. For this too, I am very grateful.

Piero had a surly character, it was easy to come into conflict with him, but behind this "rough" mask he had a kind heart. I will remember him always for his integrity, honesty and great coherence with his principles. He believed in entomology and, even more strongly, he believed in our *Alma Mater*, to which he devoted his life, without sparing himself, with a sense of belonging that remained very high even after his retirement.

When he became head of the "Guido Grandi Institute of Entomology" (later becoming the "Entomology area" in the context of the various Departments), Piero felt, very strongly, the duty to continue to pursue its tradition, in the wake of his predecessors, albeit with a gaze set always towards the future. He had, above all, a great desire to succeed in broadening the Entomology area and he unfailingly defended it and underlined its importance. He was always able to offer me sound advice, in the field of entomology, but not only: he also taught me, with common sense and realism, how to keep myself afloat in the fascinating, but at times difficult, academic world.

So I have many reasons to express my heartfelt "thanks" to Piero, whom I will always remember with respect and affection, and I hope that he can hear me, wherever he may now be.

Maria Luisa Dindo



In February 1995 I presented myself in the studio of Prof. Baronio asking him expressly to be able to work with him. Such was my admiration that had arisen from the study of forest entomology that I had carried out on his notes and from his lessons. This marked the start of a relationship lasting over twenty years, which besides being academic was also one of profound humanity.

The severity of Prof. Baronio concealed a fatherly affection. I remember his “dirty looks” when I made a mistake: in some ways it was the longest examination of my life. But his capacity to encourage study and research was unique. Research was, for the Professor, a source of enjoyment and he had the ability to transmit this passion in such a way that the hours of intense work left, in the end, a feeling of great personal satisfaction.

Moreover, I cannot fail to mention his scientific rigors and his perfectionism in bibliographic research. We spent hundreds of hours in the library looking for the rarest volume or article, and a great many hours at the microscope.

I also had the chance to spend many days with him in the forest, as well as seated at the dining table to refresh ourselves after the fatigue of sampling. On such occasions the professor revealed his most Romagnolo side and unexpected qualities of congeniality and humour. I still remember some of his quips and laugh when I think of them.

Then, in the last years, we allowed ourselves the luxury of conversing some hours a week about topics not related to entomology, ranging from history and antiques to politics. These too were moments of great teaching and an exchange of opinions that I will never forget.

Thank you professor for all you have taught me.

Antonio Martini



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