



Memorabilia

Impressions of Alexei Konstantinovich Skvortsov

David Boufford

Harvard University Herbaria, 22 Divinity Avenue, Cambridge, MA 0213-2020, U.S.A.

Email: david_boufford@harvard.edu

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My first acquaintance with Alexei Skvortsov was in the late 1970s when I was a doctoral student at the Missouri Botanical Garden. Dr. Peter Raven, my advisor, spoke very highly of Alexei's knowledge of plants and the flora of Eurasia. Because my research topic was on the systematics and evolution of the genus *Circaea* (Onagraceae), which Alexei was deeply interested in, Peter Raven wrote to him about my research and through copies of the correspondence I felt that I got to know him well. We did not meet personally until 1987 when Alexei and a small delegation of visiting botanists, sponsored by Tom Elias and the Ranch Santa Ana Botanic Garden, visited Harvard.

After that brief meeting, we did not see each other again until Alexei returned to Harvard three times in the 1990s to examine specimens of Betulaceae and Salicaceae for his treatment of those families as co-author for the Flora of China. Despite the enormous amount of work to be done to complete the treatments, we designated at least one day during each visit to go to the field to collect specimens, which Alexei clearly loved to do. On one of our excursions early in the spring I was disappointed to see mostly introduced Eurasian weeds in flower, but Alexei impressed me with his great enthusiasm for collecting everything with flowers, from *Capsella bursa-pastoris* Medik to *Glechoma hederacea* L., to common introduced grasses and, of course, the native willows and poplars. I am sure he had seen all those same introduced plants on his doorstep in Russia, but he was equally happy to see them again in another country and in a different setting.

On another trip we went to a well-developed *Sphagnum* bog surrounded by ericaceous shrubs and dwarf *Picea* infected with the tiny parasitic shrub, *Arceuthobium pusillum* Peck. The bog was like heaven for Alexei. He recounted that his early days as a botanist were spent in the bogs of Russia and that he always had a fondness for the bog vegetation. Although we arrived there in the morning, Alexei was not ready to leave until late afternoon, after he was sure he had not missed a single plant. As we walked back to the car he continued to collect trees and shrubs along the roadside, plus all the roadside weeds.

Alexei was not only a most enthusiastic botanist, but also a very sincere and very humble person. Even when he was unable to convince his co-authors of their misinterpretations of the taxonomy of *Salix* and *Populus* he did not lose his temper. Although he had extensive personal knowledge and a wealth of evidence to support his views in both groups, he accepted their judgment with a shrug of the shoulders. He seemed satisfied that he himself knew the systematics of *Salix* and *Populus* and it was their loss if they were unable to accept his knowledge and experience that he so freely and eagerly wanted to share.

Despite difficult times throughout his life, Alexei always had a positive outlook. It appeared that in plants he found peace and happiness, and as long as he could be somewhere where plants were growing or where they were preserved, he was truly happy. I feel privileged that I was able to know Alexei and to go to the field with him even a few times. He always made me feel that the way he was, a very kind, peaceful, thoughtful and appreciative person, was the way that we should all strive to be.