



Editorial

Irina Belyaeva – 60 years in the world of willows

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Irina Belyaeva has been the driving force behind *Skvortsovia* since its inception. Her vision for the journal, which is now in its fourth year, was to bring together Russian and Western, particularly British and North American, botanical networks and in that it is succeeding. It is therefore appropriate that *Skvortsovia* should mark her 60th birthday on 7th April, 2017 with a short tribute.



Irina with *Salix udensis* Trautv. & C.A.Mey.
in her garden in St Albans, UK (2017)

At the time of her birth and throughout her childhood her father, Veniamin I. Shaburov, whose birthday was also 7th April, was an expert in willow breeding and production. There are many

cultivars grown around the world that are a result of his work. He was also Director of the Botanical Garden of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Ural Branch, in Sverdlovsk, later to become Yekaterinburg, and as such he and his family lived in accommodation in the Botanical Gardens. As one might expect, the gardens were well stocked with willows, so Irina was born into a world of willows which as she grew older became her playground and then her passion. It was not surprising that Irina chose to follow a science course at university nor that she should look to the world of willows when it came to choosing a PhD project. It was while investigating ‘Interspecific variability of shrubby willows in river floodplains of the Urals’ for her PhD that she met and was influenced by Alexei Skvortsov, who became her mentor, friend and inspiration.



Irina with her father in 1997 and a demonstration of his basketry skills

This relationship continued until his death in 2008, by which time Irina had become a renowned salicologist in her own right. While following in her father's footsteps working at the Botanical Garden in Yekaterinburg, to which she has dedicated years of her career keeping the connection vibrant until the present, Irina undertook several botanical expeditions in the Urals and many other parts of Russia and the countries of the former Soviet Union. She also spent



Irina and Alexei Skvortsov in MHA on his 85th birthday (Moscow, 2005)

short periods continuing her research in Germany and Switzerland and studied willows in many other European countries and Argentina, during this time. In 2004 she was invited to the UK to identify willows in the UK's National Willow Collection at Rothamsted Research. During that year she established contacts with scientists at Kew Gardens and returned there in 2006 on a Marie Curie Fellowship to work on the World classification and phylogeny of *Salix* and *Populus*. She has remained in the UK since then and for the last nine years has had a permanent position at Kew, currently as Content Editor for the International Plant Names Index (IPNI), a role in which she received enormous encouragement and much advice on nomenclatural matters from her colleague and friend, the late Richard (Dick) Brummitt.

Although Irina's current work is in the area of general nomenclature and taxonomy, her passionate interest in Salicaceae has not diminished and most of her free time is occupied in



Irina with Desmond Meikle (left) and Dick Brummitt in Desmond's garden (Somerset, UK, 2006)

tending the many willow species and cultivars growing in her garden and in identifying herbarium specimens for anyone who asks, including members of the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) for which

she is the willows referee, a role previously performed by another great salicologist and friend, Desmond Meikle. For the last few years Irina has also been managing and editing *Skvortsovia*.

However, with her great capacity for work and her remarkable organisational skills, Irina handles all of these assignments expertly and with pleasure. Since 2006 she has studied willows and poplars outside Russia, often while on holiday, in UK, Finland (as the guest of Teuvo Ahti), Croatia, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, USA and Canada, where she collected herbarium specimens and became close personal friends with that other celebrated salicologist George Argus.

Irina has named two new species, *Salix uralicola* and *S. euxina*, the latter being a particularly important discovery as it rewrote the story of one of the best-known willows, the Crack Willow (Belyaeva, 2009. Nomenclature of *Salix fragilis* L. and a new species, *S. euxina* (Salicaceae). *Taxon* 58(4): 1344–1348). She has also named a number of new combinations, as well as co-authoring the book, ‘Willows of Ural: Atlas and Identification



Irina on a field trip near Ottawa, Canada, with George Argus

Key’ and publishing a large number of papers, in Russian and in English, in the scientific literature.

In conclusion, the Editorial Board and her many friends around the world wish Irina a very happy birthday and for all our sakes may she have many more.