

SCIENCE OR PSEUDOCRITICISM - AN ANSWER TO TWO ANONYMOUS & REVIEWERS

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Abstract - A case of scientific immorality, shameful behavior and serious belittling has been explicitly discussed.

Key Words: Scientific criticism, *Acta Zoologica Bulgarica*, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, cave fauna, endemism, relicts, pseudoscorpions, Chthoniidae, *Chthonius Chthonius (Ephippiochthonius) callatidis* n. sp., Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia

His Excellency, President of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,
His Excellency, Academician Vassil Golemansky
Ms Rossy Kaneva
Sofia - Bulgaria

Your Excellencies,
Ms Kaneva,

As a long-standing member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and friend of scientists and experts from Bulgaria, I am writing to you in my capacity as a participant in the work of your renowned institution, one of the most important in your country. I am very proud of my membership in the BAS and have supported the many interests of the Academy. I have had close contact with various ambassadors of your country in Belgrade, some of whom are my personal friends.

I am a member of the editorial board of your respected scientific journal, *Acta Zoologica Bulgarica*, which was edited by one of the best-known Bulgarian biologists, an erudite of world renown and my personal friend, collaborator, colleague and counselor, the academician Professor Dr Vassil Golemansky. I am also a member of the editorial board of the Academy's scientific journal, *Journal of Science - Doklady na BAN*. I would like to mention that I ended my speech at the celebratory assembly of the BAS where I



received a Foreign Members Diploma with the words, in Bulgarian, “Bulgaria is in my heart”. At all times in the past, present and future, your country will be part of my heart.

To date, in the above-mentioned journals I have published a large number of scientific papers, primarily from the field of evolutionary biology, as well as morphology, bio- and paleobiogeography, biogeography and animal development. I have dedicated a new taxon each of species new to science to the academician Golemansky, Prof. Dr. Dobrinka Temniskova-Topalova and Prof. Dr. Christo Deltchev. I am proud of my contributions to the scientific activities and reputation of both journals. The above-mentioned papers have been cited in a number of international scientific journals.

Recently I submitted a request to *Acta Zoologica Bulgarica* for the publication of a work authored by B. P. M. Ćurčić, S. M. Sarbu, R. N. Dimitrijević and S. B. Ćurčić titled “A new cave pseudoscorpion from the region of Mangalia (Romania): *Chthonius (Ephippiochthonius) callatidis* n. sp. (Chthoniidae, Pseudoscorpiones)”. A short time ago, I was informed by Ms Rossy Kaneva that the paper was rejected. Enclosed were the comments of the two reviewers, their scoring sheets and corrections they made to the text itself.

One of the reviewers who I know, never diagnosed or described a single taxon (from the subspecies level up to family level) from the territory of the Balkan Peninsula, and has therefore no knowledge of the cave-dwelling fauna of this region.

The other reviewer, does not know Balkan fauna and thus is possibly less competent than the first reviewer – particularly in the multidisciplinary field that is the subject of the paper submitted by my colleagues and me. Without wanting to exaggerate, I have to date described 142 arthropods new to science from all continents, and over 200 new species of arachnids from all continents, except Australia. My current bibliography is presented in the monograph “*Of the First Five Hundred*”, and this year the monograph “*Of the First Six Hundred*” will be published, listing over 600 scientific papers written by me and published in journals all over the world.

The score sheet of the first reviewer, contains the following:

Title – adequate descriptive,
 Language – needs revision,
 Interpretation – suffers from important omissions,
 Presentation and style – contains irrelevant material,
 References – inadequate,
 Illustrations – quality of figs. Inadequate,
 Units, abbreviations, formulas – should be explained,
 The paper is graded as – weak and too speculative,
 The paper is – not recommended for *Acta Zoologica Bulgarica*.

The following corrections were made by the same reviewer to the text itself (why, if his recommendation is that it should not be published?):

That Chthoniidae, *Chthonius (Ephippiochthonius) callatidis* n. sp. and Romania should be removed from the Key words;

That for the holotype of the new species the full name of the finder be given, even though “collected by one of us (SMS)” is written explicitly in the text;

The other remarks in the text are redundant, absurd, nonsensical and no suggestions are made by the reviewer as to what corrections should be done;

The reviewer thinks the number of references should be reduced, even though four of my papers published in *Acta Zoologica Bulgarica* are included. I think that his desire for my works to be excluded from the References is malicious, considering that this would reduce the citation of *Acta Zoologica Bulgarica*, thereby decreasing the impact factor of the journal.

The score sheet of the second reviewer, contains the following:

Information contained – valuable confirmation,
 Title – adequate descriptive,
 Technical and experimental methods – inadequate,
 Statistical treatment – erroneous, needs corrections,
 Language – needs revision,
 Abstract – too lengthy (*it is four sentences* - BPM),
 Material and data – insufficient,
 Interpretation – suffers from important omissions,
 Presentation – contains irrelevant material,
 Tables – should be rearranged,
 References – excessive,
 Illustrations – quality of figs. inadequate,
 The paper is graded as – weak,
 The paper is – not recommended for *Acta Zoologica Bulgarica*.

This reviewer made the following corrections to the text (why, if his recommendation is that it should not be published?):

That a typographical error be changed from “phonetically” to the correct word, “phenetically”;

The rest of the text contains no other remarks, corrections or suggestions.

I suggest to Your Excellencies that the reviews have been agreed upon – in fact, they are almost identical, which seems to indicate that the reviewers communicated with each other prior to submitting them to the journal’s editorial board. This presents a case of scientific immorality, shameful behavior and the serious belittling of the BAS as a publisher, the *Acta Zoologica Bulgarica* itself, the current editorial board, and me.

I present below examples of the synchronized activity, and comments, of both reviewers:

Reviewer 1: Description has important errors that must be arranged (?!)

Reviewer 2: Description is inadequate and not corresponds to the present taxonomic standard,

Reviewer 1: Many important taxonomic characters are omitted,

Reviewer 2: Some of the comments are hypothetical,

Reviewer 1: Figures are of scanty quality, therefore unuseful,

Reviewer 2: Figures are of poor quality...

Reviewer 1: Supposed new species seems to be identical to *Chthonius tetrachelatus*

Reviewer 2: The ...described characters coincide with those known for *C. tetrachelatus*

Reviewer 1: Authors do not know the recent redescription of *C. tetrachelatus* (Gardini, 2009, 2013),

Reviewer 2: Authors omit to indispensable papers by Gardini (2009, 2013),

Reviewer 1: The paper is to be refused,

Reviewer 2: I recommend that the paper be refused.

The comment of both reviewers that the English is weak and needs improvement I consider to be impolite and redundant because it reveals their complete unawareness of the refined literary and scientific nuances of the language, in particular its wealth of vocabulary and idioms. The English language editor of the text, whose native language it is, is an educated and literary professional, with many years of experience in proof reading and language editing. The reviewers in question are not English, respectively, and are in no way competent to judge the translation and/or correction of the English in the scientific paper submitted by myself and my colleagues for publication in the AZB.

In my modest opinion this is an example of mutual cooperation, communication and coordination of a negative opinion of my work, as if written by monozygotic twins, all aimed at drastically demeaning the BAS, *Acta Zoologica Bulgarica* and its editorial board, and myself, as a foreign member of the BAS. It is a serious scientific misdemeanor and criminal offense for there to be communication between reviewers, which in the world of science is prohibited, primitive and shows a lack of basic ethics, all the more so because it degrades institutions and personnel.



I request Your Excellencies and Ms Kaneva to remove these reviewers from your list of potential evaluators of papers to be published in all Bulgarian scientific journals, and for the editorial board of AZB to be made aware of the inconsistency and superficiality, and even exceptional ignorance, in the implementation of the procedure of management and decision-making related to improving the quality and international standing of the AZB.

I thank you in advance for your actions taken in response to this letter. I would like to inform you that inasmuch as I do not immediately receive a written apology from the editorial board of the AZB, I will be forced to withdraw my agreement to participate in the editorial boards of both BAS journals, and in three days I will inform you of my decision as to whether I (or my colleagues and associates) will ever publish future papers in the AZB.

Your Excellencies and Ms Kaneva, this letter with your eventual response will be published in their entirety in the international multidisciplinary journal *Archives of Biological Sciences, Belgrade* (IF = 0.791).

With the expression of high esteem, respect and many good wishes for your health and success, I remain,

Yours faithfully,

Prof. Dr. Božidar Ćurčić
 Fellow, Royal Entomological Society
 Foreign Member, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
 President, Serbian Biological Society
 Editor-in-Chief, *Archives of Biological Sciences, Belgrade*
 Vice-president National Commission of UNESCO – Serbia and Montenegro
 Vice-president National Commission of UNESCO Serbia
 Member, executive Committee,
 INTECOL UNESCO Stakeholder

Belgrade, 17 March 2014

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