



Miscellaneous

Assist. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Todorov: Between Wildlife and Living Science – 50 Years Dedicated to Biology, Museums, and Society

Kristiyan B. Vladov*

Regional Natural History Museum – Plovdiv, Hristo G. Danov Str. 34,
BG-4000 Plovdiv, BULGARIA

*E-mail: vladovkristiyan@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2444-1074>

Abstract. This jubilee article is dedicated to the 50th anniversary of Assist. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Todorov, a biologist, lecturer, and director of the Regional Natural History Museum – Plovdiv. It outlines his scientific and professional biography, emphasizing his leadership in the museum, participation in field studies and international expeditions, scientific contributions, and recognitions. The article discusses the significance of his work for contemporary museum practices, environmental education, and popularizing biological sciences in Bulgaria.

Keywords: Ognyan Todorov, Natural History Museum of Plovdiv, invertebrates, museum pedagogy, science communication, biodiversity

Introduction

The personality of Assist. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Todorov (Fig. 1.) embodies the characteristics of a researcher, educator, leader, and public figure, making lasting contributions to modernizing museum practices, integrating science into societal life, and building a cultural dialogue between humans and nature. His professional journey exemplifies the successful combination of academic biology with applied and educational practices aimed at the broader public. His commitment to environmental education and conservation has inspired numerous projects that significantly impacted public awareness and involvement in biodiversity protection initiatives. Due to his dedication and approachable manner, Dr. Todorov has established himself as a well-recognized and influential figure in both the scientific community and wider society. As an educator, he encourages students toward critical thinking and independent scientific projects, fostering curiosity and a passion for research. Museum exhibitions and events created under his guidance have become models for innovation and effective communication of complex scientific topics to a broad audience. Dr. Todorov actively participates in various media appearances and public forums, presenting scientific knowledge in an accessible and engaging manner. His notable public contributions also include mentoring young people, inspiring them to discover a passion for natural sciences and environmental conservation.

Dr. Todorov's personal motto, "*There's always a way,*" underscores his persistent determination and optimism in overcoming challenges throughout his extensive career. This principle has guided his scientific explorations, innovative educational methods, and successful management of various museum and conservation projects.



Fig. 1. Assist. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Todorov presenting his monograph „Atlas of Invertebrates“, September 2021. Photo: Personal archive.

Education and Academic Development

Ognyan Todorov was born in 1975 in Plovdiv. He graduated in Biology and Chemistry from the Faculty of Natural Sciences at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski.” His education was followed by in-depth research in zoology, which led to the successful defense of his doctoral dissertation at the Agricultural University – Plovdiv. His dissertation, entitled “Biodiversity, Distribution, and Economic Importance of Entomophagous Insects of the Family Aphidiidae (Hymenoptera) from Southwestern Bulgaria,” was successfully defended before the then Higher Attestation Commission in 2006.

Teaching and Educational Activities

Dr. Todorov’s professional career includes long-term teaching at Plovdiv University, where he delivers lectures and practical courses in Invertebrate Zoology, General Ecology, Nature Conservation, Hydrobiology, and Museum Studies, Botanical and Zoological Gardens. Known among students for his engaging teaching style and focus on field and practical work, he has trained generations of specialists with a strong focus on conservation and applied science.

Leadership and Transformation of the Regional Natural History Museum – Plovdiv

Since 2012, Assist. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Todorov has served as the director of the Regional Natural History Museum – Plovdiv. Under his leadership, the museum has

undergone a remarkable transformation from a traditional institution into a dynamic scientific-educational center of national and international importance (Todorov, 2016).

He executed an ambitious program for the comprehensive renovation of exhibition spaces, created a modern public aquarium, and established the museum as a platform for innovative educational practices, scientific forums, and nature conservation events. His vision and energy significantly expanded the museum's scope, audience, and scientific network.

Additionally, under his guidance, a tropical butterfly hall—one of the few in Europe—was constructed, combining biological attraction with educational value, allowing visitors immersive experiences among numerous tropical butterfly species.

Dr. Todorov developed and implemented the first digital 3D planetarium in Bulgaria, which already enriches astronomical education in the region and complements the multidisciplinary profile of the museum. These achievements have brought wide national and international recognition to the institution, including prestigious awards for innovation in museum practices (Fig. 2.).



Fig. 2. Assist. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Todorov receiving the “Museum of the Year” award, 2016.
Photo: Personal archive.

Scientific Expeditions and Field Research

Dr. Todorov's field and expeditionary work has been extensive at both national and international levels. He has participated in numerous scientific trips across Bulgaria, focusing on wetland fauna, karst springs, and mountain lakes, as well as international expeditions to Uganda, the Amazon (Fig. 3.), and Southeast Asia (Fig. 8.), and fieldwork in the Andes (Figs 4 and 5). In 2024, he participated in a research mission to East Africa, documenting the faunal diversity of seven national parks, including gorillas, chimpanzees, rare bird species, and hoofed animals (Figs 6 and 7). The photographs collected during these journeys significantly enhance Dr. Todorov's personal archive and the museum's resources, supporting research, education, and public awareness of biodiversity.



Fig. 3. Assist. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Todorov during field research on the Amazon River, 2024. Photo: Personal archive.



Fig. 4. Field research at Vinicunca (Rainbow Mountain), Andes, Peru, conducted by Assist. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Todorov in 2024. Photo: Personal archive.



Fig. 5. During field research in the Andes, Assist. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Todorov points to the Inca ruins of Choquequirao, Peru, 2024. Photo: Personal archive.



Fig. 6. Wild gorillas observed during fieldwork in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda, 2024, as part of a research expedition led by Assist. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Todorov. Photo: Personal archive.



Fig. 7. During field research in 2024, Assist. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Todorov observed African elephants along the Nile in Murchison Falls National Park, Uganda. Photo: Personal archive.



Fig. 8. Assist. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Todorov during field research at the historical site of Ayutthaya, Thailand, 2025. Photo: Personal archive.

Scientific Publications and Contributions

Dr. Ognyan Todorov's research encompasses diverse fields, including marine biology, invertebrate zoology, entomology, parasitology, herpetology, science communication, and museum education. He is the author and co-author of over 19 scientific publications indexed in international databases, contributing significantly to biodiversity research and documentation in Bulgaria and the region.

In 2021, Dr. Todorov published the monograph *Atlas of Invertebrates* (Todorov, 2021), featuring over 1700 illustrations, 1164 of which are his original works. The atlas covers systematics, morphology, habitats, and adaptations of major invertebrate groups and is extensively used in educational settings, from university students to specialized conservation and ecology schools.

His notable scientific contributions include entomological studies on the subfamily Aphidiinae (Hymenoptera: Braconidae), aphid parasitoids with new species records for Bulgaria; description of a new parasitoid wasp species (*Boreogalba julianae*, Todorov, 2023) discovered in Osogovo Mountain; herpetological research documenting new amphibian and reptile occurrences in Strandzha Nature Park and the Southern Black Sea Coast; co-authorship in an ornithological catalog of the former "St. Augustine" College collection housed in the museum, detailing 193 bird species from 81 families; parasitological studies of ixodid ticks affecting domestic animals near Plovdiv, with epidemiological importance; and active participation in science popularization through educational exhibitions and nature conservation programs.

Awards and Recognitions

Assist. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Todorov has been honored with numerous awards, including:

- "Plovdiv" Honorary Badge for contributions to culture and education;
- Certificate from the Ministry of Culture of Bulgaria for contributions to museum practices;
- Recognition for innovative museum practices by the Bulgarian Museums Association;
- Awards from educational and conservation organizations for contributions to biodiversity protection.

The following photographs (Figs 9 and 10) illustrate some of these recognitions and awards received by Dr. Todorov, showcasing his achievements and the esteem with which he is regarded by cultural and scientific institutions.

Conclusion

Assist. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Todorov exemplifies a modern scientist adeptly integrating field and laboratory research, teaching, science communication, leadership, and innovation. He does more than manage a museum—he builds bridges between knowledge and inspiration, academic science, and youthful curiosity about nature. On the occasion of his 50th anniversary, Dr. Todorov deserves recognition from colleagues, students, and the wider public as a figure who has significantly contributed to bridging science, culture, and society.



Fig. 9. Assist. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Todorov honored for cultural contributions. Photo: Personal archive.



Fig. 10. Assist. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Todorov with a certificate and plaque recognizing his support and cooperation with the Faculty of Plant Protection and Agroecology. Photo: Personal archive.

References

- Todorov O. 2016. Regional Natural History Museum – Plovdiv. *Bulletin of the Natural History Museum – Plovdiv*, 1: vii-xiv (in Bulgarian).
- Todorov O. 2021. *Atlas of Invertebrates*. Regional Natural History Museum – Plovdiv. 504 p. (in Bulgarian).

Received: 11.06.2025

Accepted: 05.08.2025

Published: 06.08.2025