
OBITUARY



Ramon Margalef
1919-2004

Prof. Ramon Margalef passed away in Barcelona on the 23rd May 2004, aged 85. His role as a leading ecologist is well known and available in many publications, memorials and websites. I would only like to comment here and remark, in my role of Editor-in-Chief of *Scientia Marina*, some personal experiences. These experiences are representative of those that impacted the formation of many "generations" of students both at the University of Barcelona, where he was the first Spanish Professor of Ecology, and at the many courses, lectures and meetings where students and researchers had the honour to hear him lecture. Perhaps I am not the most suited person to write about him, but perhaps I can write from a certain distance as a person on which Prof. Margalef's science and naturalist messages made a sound impact. Many of us have felt proud of working on biology, ecology, oceanography, environmental or biological sciences thanks to his teachings and views of life and ecological processes. Through his guidance, many of us have seen the usefulness of being a scientist.

I personally was lucky enough to have Prof. Margalef as the first lecturer of the General Biology course at the Faculty of Biology of the University of Barcelona, back in 1976. I remember well that lecture. All of us, young students, were ready to start taking notes from his lecture, as we were used to do in most, if not all, lectures we attended. Most of us started taking notes, but, after two or three minutes, we all gave up. People started to look at each other: it was impossible to take notes. That was a LECTURE, in upper case, live, full of knowledge gained from experience and full of joy, the joy of understanding and the joy of transmitting that understanding, of making it public.

At the end of the lecture, one of the students raised his hand and was brave enough to ask him which book was he going to follow to give the course. From that question, I remember he gave us three recommendations. First of all, he said something like *"A book? None of them, and all of them! What you have to do is read, read a lot, from different authors, get different points of view from the same subject or question, digest them and take your own conclusions. In this way you are going to learn a lot, and certainly much more than if you just follow one book, even if it is the best structured and didactic book on the subject"*. Then, he told us to travel, to travel a lot, to go to different places, the more different, the better. *"In this way, you are going to see what happens (read ecological processes) in areas different from yours, different from the areas and places where you are used to live and see but probably not used to properly looking at. Processes that are happening here but that you do not see, because they occur at a smaller scale and, in addition, most of you are not used to noting (he was a great NATURALIST, also in upper case). When you see these processes at a much larger scale (I think he was talking of upwelling areas and oceanic frontal structures), then you understand what is happening at home (it is the old story of the trees and the forest)"*. I honestly remember that he gave us three main recommendations. I can't remember the third, probably because it was not as attractive for young people as the first two. His lectures and conversations made certainly a deep impact in all people ready to listen and talk with him.

In addition, and now from a more professional point of view, many of us, biologists, oceanographers, ecologists, etc. have often talked and discussed about precisely what "to publish" means. Many people, people who have known Prof. Margalef much better than I, have always remarked that for him, to publish was not a question of "publish or perish", as is too often the case nowadays, but it was a question of responsibility, a duty, a useful task. To publish results and observations in science is to make it public, to transmit to the public the knowledge gained from our field and laboratory work. Even though modest, contributions may be extremely useful to make science improve and advance (being an editor of a scientific journal, I need to add that in order to publish something correctly, manuscripts need to be correct not only in content but also in shape, of course).

I would like these brief remembrances and thoughts to be my personal small homage to Prof. Margalef. I hope it is useful. Many of us will always be grateful to him for trying to form us as true scientists and naturalists, to watch nature, to ask questions, to try to answer them, and to try to understand nature.

Pere Abelló
Scientia Marina