

Obituary: Valery K. Eremchenko (1949-2014)

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On 14 April 2014 a leading herpetologist of Central Asia and a former member of the *Societas Herpetologica Italica*, Valery Konstantinovich Eremchenko (Fig. 1), passed away in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, after several years of severe illness. Valery is survived by his second wife Anna Zemtseva and two daughters: Victoria (now in Israel) and Darya (a schoolgirl, in Bishkek).

We lost a remarkable expert of the herpetofauna of Middle Asia, a friend and collaborator. An obituary containing a brief biography was recently published on Amphibia-Reptilia (AMRE, Borkin et al., 2015). Therefore, below are only listed the main steps of the scientific career of V.K. Eremchenko. For more details, please read the aforementioned obituary, which appeared in AMRE.

1949 - Dr. Eremchenko was born on June, 27, in Morozovsk, Rostov Province, U.S.S.R. (now Russian Federation).

1970 - Technical assistant at the Institute of Biology, Academy of Sciences of the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic, Frunze (now Bishkek).

1977 - Valery attended the 4th Soviet Herpetological Conference in Leningrad, where he was introduced to the herpetological community of the former Soviet Union.

1977 - Graduated from the Frunze State University with a Diploma in Biology, including the license to teach biology and chemistry in normal schools.

1979-1981 - Probationer of research (*research stazhor*) in the Laboratory of Vertebrates, the Institute of Biology, Academy of Sciences of the Kirghiz SSR, Frunze.

1980 - Eremchenko (together with Valentina Toropova, his first wife) published his first paper in herpetology devoted to reptilian fauna of the Tokmak town environs (Chu Valley); formerly they published several papers in ornithology.

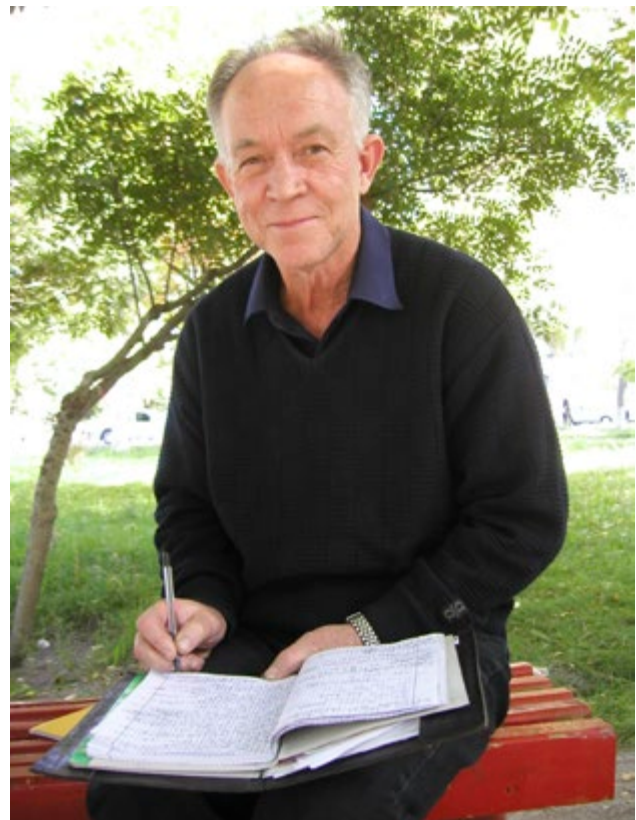


Fig. 1. Valery Konstantinevich Eremchenko in 2005 (photograph courtesy François Soulard, Traversees).

1981 - Senior laboratory technician, and after several months, Junior research fellow, a first permanent research position in the former U.S.S.R.

1981 - Postgraduate student at the Institute of Zoology, Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in Kiev, advised by N. N. Szczerbak.

1984 - Eremchenko successfully defended his thesis at the Institute of Zoology, Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in Kiev and received the Candidate of Science degree, an equivalent to a Ph.D.

1985 - Senior research fellow at the Institute of Biology, Academy of Sciences of the Kirghiz S.S.R..

1988 - Head of the Zoological Museum at the Institute of Biology, from then on the leading Kirghiz S.S.R. scientific institution in herpetology.

1990 - In October Eremchenko and some colleagues, including Leo Borkin, were invited scientists to Chengdu, China, by Prof. Zhao Ermi and other Chinese herpetologists. It was Valery's first visit outside the former Soviet Union.

1992 - In July Valery participated in the First Asian Herpetological Meeting, held in Huangshan, China.

2004 - Head of the exhibition department in the Kyrgyz-Russian (Slavic) University.

2008 - Valery retired.

After the collapse of Soviet Union (December 1991), unlike other scientists who left the previous Soviet Republics due to growing nationalistic pressure and economic disaster, Valery decided to stay in the now independent Kyrgyz Republic.

In a "first world" country, one can only roughly imagine what it means surviving and performing scientific research in a country ranging in the lowest third of world poverty. During this period, Valery struggled for both, the continuation of his scientific work and surviving with his family in a rapidly transforming country that was shaken by several regime changes since. Valery continued various herpetological studies in the Kyrgyz Republic and neighboring parts of Kazakhstan, in cooperation with herpetologists from several countries: Russia (Leo J. Borkin), Switzerland (Notker Helfenberger, Gaston Guex), Kazakhstan (Tatiana Dujsebaeva), Italy (Emilio Balletto, Cristina Giacomina, Roberto Sindaco), and Germany (Matthias Stöck, at the time, Berkeley and Lausanne), sometimes supported by the Russian Foundation of Basic Research and Earthwatch Institution (USA). From 2005, Valery also started working for regional offices of NABU, a German NGO, devoted to nature conservation in Central Asia, where he got employed under several contracts until 2014. He was a member of the Soviet Herpetological Society (now A.M. Nikolsky Herpetological Society, St. Petersburg), Asiatic Herpetological Society (Berkeley, Chengdu) and Italian Herpetological Society (Turin).

According to personal files, kept at the Bishkek Institute of Biology and Soil, Eremchenko (co-) authored at

least 55 full papers, mostly in Russian; five of them were devoted to birds of Kirghizia. His name *Eremchenko* was transliterated also as *Jeremčenko* (scientific transliteration), *Jeriomtschenko*, and *Yeriomchenko*. His herpetological publications spanned the period from 1977-2011, and primarily covered systematics, distribution, and faunistics of amphibians and reptiles of Kyrgyzstan, and other republics of former Soviet Middle Asia.

Valery described 17 new taxa of reptiles, most of these descriptions and names are still valid (Table 1). In honor of Valery, a mountain skink from Kyrgyzstan, *Asymblepharus eremchenkoi* Panfilov, 1999 has been described. This list of zoological papers was compiled to the best of our ability, but may be incomplete. In the last years, Valery published in local magazines that have been virtually inaccessible to us. Despite our efforts, it was not possible to obtain further information from Kyrgyz institutions or from his former colleagues.

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2. Toropova, V.I., Eremchenko, V.K. (1977): [Additions to the list of nesting birds of Chu Valley]. In: Yurlov, K.T. (ed.). [Migrations of Birds in Asia]. Nauka Press, Trudy Biologicheskogo Institut, Sibirskogo otdeleniya Akademii nauk SSSR [Trans. Biol. Inst., Siberian Branch, USSR Acad. Sci.], Novosibirsk 33: 222. [in Russian].
3. Eremchenko, V.K., Szczerbak ("Shcherbak"), N.N. (1980): [About generic allocation of ablepharid lizards (Reptilia, Sauria, Scincidae) of fauna of the U.S.S.R.]. *Vestnik Zoologii* [Bull. Zool.], Kiev 4: 10-15. [in Russian, with English summary].
4. Eremchenko, V.K., Szczerbak ("Shcherbak"), N.N. (1980): [A new species of lidless lizard - *Ablepharus lindbergi* sp. n. (Reptilia, Sauria, Scincidae) from Afghanistan]. *Vestnik Zoologii* [Bull. Zool.], Kiev 6: 84-86. [in Russian, with English summary].
5. Toropova, V.I., Eremchenko, V.K. (1980): [On the breeding of the Common Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata* L.) in Kirgiziya]. *Problemi bioecologii zhivotnikh i rasteniy i okhrana okruzhaushchei sredi* [The problems of animal and plant biology and environment protection.]. *Sbornik dokladov molodikh uchenikh Instituta biologii Akademii nauk Kirgizskoi S.S.R.* [= Collected Reports of Young Scientists Inst. Biol. Acad. Sci. Kyrgyz S.S.R.] Ilim Press, Frunze: 47-48. [in Russian].
6. Toropova, V.I., Eremchenko, V.K. (1980): [Migrations of birds in Kar-Kara (Kirghizia)]. In: Abdusalyamov,

Table 1. Reptile taxa described by V.K. Eremchenko

Original name	Authors	Journal	Present name / Status
Family GEKKONIDAE			
<i>Alsophylax (Altiphylax) tokobajevi</i> n. sp.	Jeriomtschenko and Szczerbak, 1984	Vestnik Zoologii, Kiev, 2: 47-50	<i>Altiphylax tokobajevi</i> (Eremchenko & Szczerbak, 1984)
<i>Altiphylax</i> n. subgen.	Jeriomtschenko and Szczerbak, 1984	Vestnik Zoologii, Kiev, 2: 47	accepted genus
<i>Cyrtopodion narynensis</i> n. sp.	Eremchenko, Tsarinenko and Panfilov, 1999	Izvestiya Natsionalnoy Akademii Nauk Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki, Bishkek, 3-4: 48-55	<i>Mediodactylus narynensis</i> (Eremchenko, Tsarinenko & Panfilov, 1999)
Family LACERTIDAE			
<i>Dimorphea</i> n. subgen.	Eremchenko, 1999	Izvestiya Natsionalnoy Akademii Nauk Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki, Bishkek, 1: 73	accepted subgenus
<i>Eremias kokshaaliensis</i> n. sp.	Eremchenko and Panfilov, 1999	Nauka i Novye Tekhnologii, Bishkek, 4: 118-120.	accepted species
<i>Eremias multiocellata szczerbaki</i> n. ssp.	Eremchenko ["Jeriomtschenko"] and Panfilov, 1992	Konspekt issledovaniy po tsitogenetike i sistematike nekotorykh asiatskikh vidov (Scincidae i Lacertidae), Ilim Press, Bishkek: 69-71	<i>Eremias szczerbaki</i> Eremchenko and Panfilov, 1992
<i>Eremias velox borkini</i> n. subsp.	Eremchenko and Panfilov, 1999	Nauka i Novye Tekhnologii, (1): 122-123	accepted subspecies
Family SCINCIDAE			
<i>Ablepharus darvazi</i> n. sp.	Jeriomtschenko et Panfilov, 1990	Izvestiya Akademii Nauk Kirghizskoy S.S.R., khimiko-tekhnologicheskie i biologicheskie nauki, 4: 56-63	accepted species
<i>Asymblepharus</i> n. gen.	Eremchenko et Szczerbak ("Shcherbak"), 1980	Vestnik Zoologii, Kiev, 4: 10-15.	accepted genus
<i>Asymblepharus alaicus yakovlevae</i> n. ssp.	Eremchenko, 1983	Vestnik Zoologii, Kiev 1983 (2): 35-42.	accepted subspecies
<i>Asymblepharus ladacensis stimsoni</i> n. ssp.	Eremchenko ["Jeriomtschenko"], 1992	Konspekt issledovaniy po tsitogenetike i sistematike nekotorykh asiatskikh vidov (Scincidae i Lacertidae), Ilim Press, Bishkek: 58-65	accepted subspecies
<i>Asymblepharus mahabharatus</i> n. sp.	Jeremchenko, Shah and Panfilov, 1998	Izvestiya Natsionalnoy Akademii Nauk Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki, Bishkek, 4: 42-43.	accepted species
<i>Asymblepharus nepalensis</i> n. sp.	Eremchenko and Helfenberger, 1998	Izvestiya Natsionalnoy Akademii Nauk Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki, Bishkek, 4: 41-45	accepted species
<i>Himablepharus</i> n. subgen.	Eremchenko ["Jeriomtschenko"], 1987	Izvestiya Akademii Nauk Kirgizskoy S.S.R., Frunze, khimiko-tekhnologicheskie nauki, 2: 54-57.	accepted subgenus of <i>Asymblepharus</i>
<i>Kaestlea</i> n. gen.	Eremchenko and Das, 2004	Hamadryad, 28 (1-2): 43-50.	accepted genus
<i>Livorimica</i> n. gen.	Eremchenko, 2003	Izvestiya Vuzov, Bishkek, 1-2: 20-28.	currently considered a synonym of <i>Sphenomorphus</i> (Nguyeng et al. 2011)
<i>Livorimica bacboensis</i> n. sp.	Eremchenko, 2003	Izvestiya Vuzov, Bishkek, 1-2: 20-28.	<i>Sphenomorphus bacboensis</i> (Eremchenko, 2003)

I.A. (ed.), [Migrations of Birds in Asia]. Dushanbe: Donish Press: 119-125. [in Russian].

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