



## Matti Nuorteva

\* 6.4.1928 † 15.7.2023

Matti Kalevi Nuorteva, Professor Emeritus of Agricultural and Forest Zoology at the University of Helsinki, died in Kauniala Hospital on 15 July 2023 at the age of 95. He was born on 6 April 1928 to a family living in Töölö, Helsinki.

Matti Nuorteva's father Väinö wrote causeries for the newspaper *Uusi Suomi* under the pseudonym Olli. Growing up with his brother Pekka, Matti's childhood years were happy, but wars cast a shadow over his youth. In 1944, at the age of 15, he volunteered as a Soldier Boy in the anti-aircraft defence during the Continuation War in the fields of Viikki, the same place where he would later work. On his initiative, the Viikki Air Defence was erected on the site.

Choosing a career was easy for Nuorteva. Even as a child, he was interested in the professions of a carpenter, a zoologist, an explorer and a forester. Forest zoology was a discipline that allowed him to combine all his interests.

Nuorteva began his scientific journey at the age of 18 by publishing a paper on a square-headed wasp (*Sphécidae*). His extensive scientific work would later focus especially on the ecology and biological control of bark beetles, which are known as

pests. However, the painful war memories from the fields of Viikki as a young school-boy were locked deep within the recesses of his mind. It was not until the leisurely days of retirement that enough time had passed to deal with these memories, some of which were traumatic. This process was helped along by the active writing of popular and often interdisciplinary articles on animals, geology, amber and various natural phenomena. Nuorteva had developed this habit of writing already in his childhood home as he watched his father write causeries. In many of his publications, Matti Nuorteva followed his original plan and wrote to the general public about the vital importance of forest insects and other invertebrates to the functioning of ecosystems.

Nuorteva played a key role in improving our knowledge of forest pests. He did his life's work at the Viikki campus of the University of Helsinki. Several decades worth of forestry students had a chance to listen to his heart-warming stories about forest pests at the Hyytiälä Forestry Field Station in Juupajoki, where he was first an assistant to his predecessor, Professor of Agricultural and Forest Zoology Esko Kangas, and later a professor in the field.

Nuorteva was known as an inspiring and compelling teacher. His solid expertise was combined with a warm, empathetic pedagogical approach. The ultimate goal of his teaching was to help others understand the importance of forest pests and to take them into consideration in practical forestry.

As an avid naturalist, he amassed a large collection of insects over the decades, especially sawflies, bark beetles and long-legged flies (*Medetera*). He first grew his collections with his brother Pekka, who would later become Professor of Environmental Protection at the University of Helsinki. Later, Matti Nuorteva continued to expand his sawfly collection at his summer house in Vuohiniemi, Hattula, together with his sons. His collections allowed Nuorteva to combine work and leisure, as the resulting long-term monitoring made him the first to demonstrate the impact of the treatment of forests on the biodiversity of forest nature, specifically the size of pest populations.

Matti Nuorteva always strived for fairness and justice in all his duties and interactions, which was also evident in his work as Vice-Dean and Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry.

He stood in the front lines in the fight against invasive species when pine wood nematodes that threaten Finnish forests were found in a batch of imported timber. Consequently, a ban was imposed across Europe on the import of untreated wood

from North America and areas where the pine wood nematode was known to occur.

As a scientist, Nuorteva kept in close contact with his international colleagues in both the East and the West. In the 1970s, he took a group of forestry students on an excursion to China under Mao, and the University of California, Berkeley invited him as a visiting professor. Nuorteva was invited to become a member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 1983.

Nuorteva was involved in the activities of numerous branches of science and religious and charitable organisations. Photographing nature and especially forest insects was a dear hobby of his. In his free time, he enjoyed woodwork, repairing things and working with his hands – perhaps because of his childhood dream of becoming a carpenter. He taught his family responsible forest management, independent initiative and a knowledge of natural values, culture and history. The family would go camping together in the summer, often in Lapland or the Nordic countries – without forgetting visits to museums. The insect laboratory at the summer cottage made it possible to do research even while spending time with the family.

Matti Nuorteva was married to his spouse Kaija for 69 years and they had four children. Their family was their whole world. As a father, Matti was always there to help and guide his children, teaching them to respect all people as equals and to also appreciate different opinions.

*Kari Heliövaara, Heikki Nuorteva  
and Jouko Nuorteva*