

Prof. Nicola Ricci (1947-2000)

Shortly after his 53rd birthday, Nicola Ricci died. Many who knew this gentle man were aware of the pain he had endured during the last ten months of his life. His untimely passing on October 28, 2000 was a deep grief to our community of protozoologists.

Prof. Ricci became interested in biology early in his life and had maintained this curiosity until his death. In the very beginning, he worked with Prof. Renzo Nobili on the preconjugal cell interactions of *Oxytricha bifaria*. Later he interpreted the conjugation of *O. bifaria*, together with the formation of giants and cysts, in a wider context, as a sort of primary «cell differentiation». In 1979 he began to study the behaviour of ciliates, thus also starting an etho-ecological approach to their adaptive biology. He considered ciliates not only as «simple» eukaryotic cells, but as complete organisms, and came to a conclusion that their «cell motility» represents true «behavior», whose adaptive significance can be an object of study. Prof. Ricci explored the anti-intuitive environment of ciliates, studying their behaviour under different external conditions. He demonstrated that they perceive even the slightest changes in their environment. In recent years, he tried to set up a method of analysis of environment parameters by recording the changes of behavioural parameters (etho-bio-monitoring).

Prof. Ricci spent a lot of his efforts teaching zoology (his own course, since 1981), as well as Protozoology, Applied Ecology, Microbial Ecology, and Laboratory of Experimental Biology. He loved teaching, because it



forced him «to make the stuff clear». Moreover the students' questions «Why? Why not?» and «What if?» made him always alert and responsible. He was an enthusiastic teacher and a brilliant scientific researcher. The memory of him will remain in the hearts of those who knew him.

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