

## ACADEMIC CURRICULUM VITAE

**Prof. Dr Nikolai SPASSOV**

**BIRTH DATE:** April 07 1951, Sofia, Bulgaria

### **EDUCATION:**

- 1974 - M.Sc. in Vertebrate Zoology, Faculty of Biology - University of Sofia " St Kliment Ohridski"

### **POSTGRADUATE SPECIALIZATIONS:**

- 1979; 1981 - Laboratory of Paleontology ( National Museum of Natural History, Paris); Institute of Paleontology and Institute of Evolutionary Morphology & Ecology, Moscow

### **SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENT AND DEGREES, INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION:**

1975 - Vertebrate zoologist, Inst. of Zoology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences;  
1978 - Assistant Professor in the National Museum of Natural History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia (NMNHS)  
2000 - Ph.D. on Zoology (about Plio-Pleistocene mammals of Europe) - NMNHS  
2001 - Associate Professor at the National Museum of Natural History, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia; Sofia  
since 2011 – professor at the National Museum of Natural History, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia  
2011 – 2020 – Director of the National Museum of Natural History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia

**Current position:** after retirement - reassigned to NMNHS as curator of fossil and recent mammals in the National Museum of Natural History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences; member (as a professor) of the Scientific Council of the NMNHS

### **SCIENTIFIC INTERESTS:**

more than 250 scientific papers in the fields of the paleontology and the evolution of mammals, the human evolution, the archaeozoology, the recent mammal fauna (faunistics, taxonomy, morphology, zoogeography) and the biodiversity conservation.

A number of these works were achieved in the National Museum of Natural History, Paris; The Universities of Thassaloniki, Athens and Tübingen; The Inst. of Paleontology and palaeoanthropology, Beijing; The Royal Belgian Institute of natural sciences; The National Museum of Natural History, Washington D.C., the Royal museum of C. Africa, Tervuren, Belgium etc. The results of these scientific studies have been presented at more than 30 scientific congresses and symposia in various European countries, the USA and China.

## **PROJECTS AND FIELD WORK:**

Team leader or participant of /in more than 40 paleontological and zoological projects and field works.

Among them, in the field of the zoology and fauna conservation:

1983 - zoological expedition in Mozambique; 1990 - in Gobi desert (Mongolia); zoological missions in Anatolia and Azerbaijan for studying the status of rare and disappearing in the area large carnivores, such as the leopard and the striped hyena (2015, 2018-2019); field investigations in the frames of national projects on faunal conservation (granted by Natura 2000, the Bulgarian Ministry of the environment and waters etc.) till 2022.

Among them, in the field of the paleontology and the paleoanthropology: 1984 – participation in an archaeological expedition in Southern Caucasus (Georgia); From 2002 till now - team leader of a series of field projects and paleontological excavations of the of NMNHS related to Late Miocene Hipparion fauna and to the search of the latest European hominids and the beginning of human origins, with field work in Bulgaria and Republic of N. Macedonia. Were granted consecutively by L.S.B. Leakey Foundation, The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, The Ministry of culture of N. Macedonia ; The National Science Fund of Bulgaria and others.

## **MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO RESEARCH AND EDUCATION:**

- In the field of the zoology and the fauna protection:

Participation as an author in the two volumes on Carnivora in Handbuch der Säugetiere Europas, 1993 (Aula Verlag GmbH, Wiesbaden) - the only mammal fauna of Europe to date; contributions to the study of the fauna of Mozambique (two new species of large mammals reported for the country (1988;1990); study of the fauna of the Caucasus with the discovery of new carnivore mammal from the fauna of Georgia (1986); research on the status of the last leopard of Asia Minor, Turkey (2016) and Transcaucasia, Azerbaijan (2019); numerous works on endangered carnivores from the fauna of Bulgaria and the Balkans.

- In the fields of the paleontology, the mammalian evolution and the paleoanthropology:

Organizer of the Bulgarian-French paleontological mission in the Pliocene locality of Dorkovo, Western Rhodopes (1985-1987). Nikolai Spassov has been the head of the reorganized department of Paleontology of the NMNHS since its creation in 2006, and all the specialists in this direction in the museum (NMNHS) were or are his Ph. D. students. Through his efforts were created the majority of the NMNHS's mammalian paleontological and archaeozoological collections.

In 1990, the Paleontological Museum of Assenovgrad has been founded as a branch of the National Museum of Natural History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia (NMNHS), thanks to the initiative of Nikolai Spassov. Currently, the museum is in the disposal of more than 35 000 fossils from the late Miocene mammals – one of the most valuable and rich collections in the world of the so-called Pikermian fauna. By the initiative of Nikolai Spassov the NMNHS becomes a central place of to set up an international research team of palaeontologists and geologists, that in 1999 started intense palaeontological, geological and paleozoogeographic research on the late

Miocene of the Balkans (in Bulgaria and in Republic of North Macedonia). Due to the research undertaken, new localities of late Miocene vertebrate fauna have been discovered, excavated and studied. As a result, new species of fossil mammals were described and the organized research leads to the enrichment of knowledge about the faunal evolution of the Balkan-Iranian paleozoogeographic province of the Late Miocene.

Nikolai Spassov is a co-author or author of more than ten species and five genera of new to science ancient mammals, which were described from Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Germany, Mongolia, China and Kazakhstan. Thanks to his efforts was discovered and described (2012) in Azmaka locality (Bulgaria) a fossil hominid find, belonging to the Europe's latest pre-human hominid. This research gives impetus to new investigations in which Nikolai Spassov is among the leading authors: A study describe a new Late Miocene hominid from Bavaria (the genus *Danuvius*) which was able to move on two legs, albeit in trees; another investigation establish the absolute age (7.2 Ma) of the latest pre-human European hominid *Graecopithecus* and argue the hypothesis (2017; 2018) that it should be the earliest member of the evolutionary lineage leading to humans, showing by this that not only Africa, but also the Balkans deserve attention as a potential area of origin of the first hominins. These researches (2021) show also that at the end of the late Miocene there were massive faunal dispersals from Eurasia to Africa which can explain the possible appearance of Balkan early hominins in Africa, where human evolution continued.

A number of N. Spassov's works are also devoted to the question of the earliest human occupation of Europe and the routes of this dispersal from Africa to Europe. His studies show (2001; 2016) that potentially the earliest possible entry of *Homo* into Europe was related to the cooling that began just over 2 million years ago and becomes causes of the creation of a land connection between the Balkans and Asia Minor.

## **MEMBERSHIP:**

- Member of the International Council of Archeozoology 1989 - 1993;
- Member of the Bear Specialist Group (IUCN- SSC) 1991- 1995;
- Member of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology (USA), since 2000
- Co-founder of the Journal *Historia Naturalis Bulgarica* and member of the editorial committee of the journal - 1989 - 1995;
- Associate researcher – Lab. « Dynamique de l'Évolution Humaine », CNRS – UPR 2147, Paris ( 2004)
- Member of the editorial board of *Neues Jahrbuch für Geologie und Paläontologie, Abhandlungen* since 2008
- Member of the Hominoid Analytical Working Group of RHOI (*REVEALING HOMINID ORIGINS INITIATIVE* ) since 2009
- Member of the NOW (Neogene Mammal Database) Advisory Board, Univ. of Helsinki, since 2010
- Chief Editor of *Priroda (Nature)*, a journal of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences for popularization of the natural sciences

## **AWARDS**

- 1989 - award of the Bulgarian and Polish Academies of Sciences for ecological studies
- 1997 - Henry Ford award for the conservation of the national cultural & natural heritage
- 2004 – co-author of the book: *Living with Bears, A large European carnivore in a shrinking world*. Krystufek, B., B. Flajsman, Huw Griffiths (eds.). Ekoforum, Ljubljana, 368 p. awarded with the Technikal Prize of the Conseil International de la Chasse et de la Conservation du Gibier (CIC) for 2004.
- 2009 – The Academician Ivan Buresh award of the National Museum of Natural History, Sofia for contributions to the zoology and paleontology of Bulgaria as well as to the progress of the Museum.
- 2021 – The Marin Drinov award of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences for scientific merit.

## **ADDRESS:**

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