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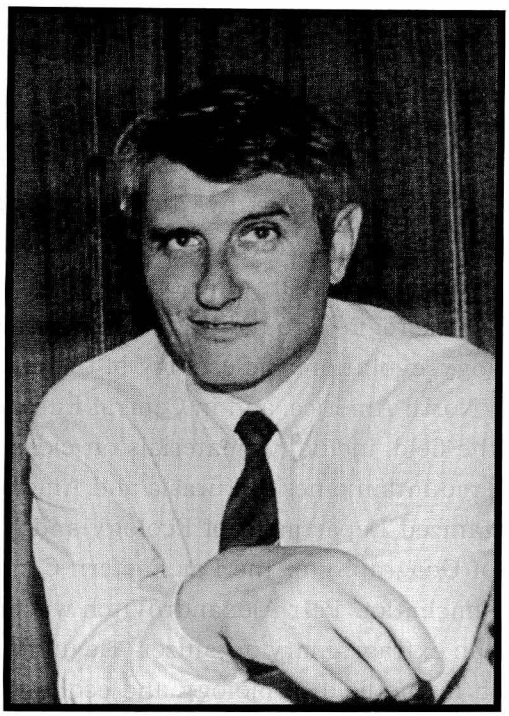
Petr Alexandrovitch Khomentovsky

(16. 04. 1947–29. 07. 1998)



Petr A. Khomentovsky died suddenly of a heart attack on July 29, 1998, at the age of 52. He was one of the greatest scientists of the Russian Far East, who made an invaluable contribution to the development of biology and ecology in the region. All of his life to the very last days—was devoted to Science. Khomentovsky was born April 16, 1947 in Orenburg, Russia. His father was the well-known scientist Alexandr S. Khomentovsky, a geologist and ecologist who participated in founding the institutes of the Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences (FEB RAS). The elder Khomentovsky was an organizer and the first director of the Khabarovsk Institute of Water and Ecology Problems of the FEB RAS in 1968. His profession and personality helped define his son's fate. As a young schoolboy, Petr participated in expeditions that his father organized in the Ural region, in Siberia and in the Russian Far East. In 1965 Petr Khomentovsky graduated from high school in Vladivostok and entered the Department of forest economy of the Moscow Forest-Technical Institute. While a student, he wrote and published his first scientific work on characteristics of wood pathology of flora condition of Hoper Nature Reserve. After graduation and service in the army, Petr finished the postgraduate course at the Institute of Biology and Soil

Sciences of the FEB of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in Vladivostok. At that time the object of his research was fauna and flora of Kamchatka coniferous woods. In 1978 Petr successfully defended his Ph. D. dissertation on "Ksilophag Insects of Coniferous Woods of Kamchatka" at the Institute of Wood and Timber of the Siberian Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in Krasnoyarsk. Four years later he moved to Kamchatka to work in the Forest Experimental Station in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. He tried to get as close as possible to the object of his research and understood the necessity of developing biological science in Kamchatka. He studied fundamental problems of Kamchatka's tundra-wood landscape vegetation particularly focusing on the biology and ecology of the dwarf pine (*Pinus pumila*). This conifer occupies more than 40% of the general forest area of Kamchatka. Study of *Pinus pumila* occupied much time of the final years of Khomentovsky's life. But his scientific interests were not limited to the region around Kamchatka and Magadan. To develop a general study of the biology, evolution, and ecology of the dwarf pine, he worked in the Baikal basin region, in North America, and in Central Europe. He put together all of the existing works in the field, including materials on close relatives to the *Pinus pumila* species, such as the mountain pines of Eurasia and America. In 1986 Khomentovsky moved to the reorganized Department of Ecology and Natural Resource Management at the Institute of Geography of the Far Eastern Center of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in Kamchatka. Petr Alexandrovitch was not only a diligent and versatile scientist but also an extraordinary organizer. He understood well the need to develop academic research in the field of biology and ecology in the unique natural environment of Kamchatka. During the same year he organized a laboratory of plant ecology. His selfless and principled efforts enabled the Environmental Department to be reorganized as the Kamchatka Institute of Ecology and Natural Resources Management of the FEB RAS. Khomentovsky's scientific interests were broad and many-sided. They included, among other things, botanical-geographical research and studies of various aspects of ecological adaptations of the main forest-formed plants of Kamchatka and bordering territories. In his researches, Dr. Khomentovsky applied the experience of both Russian and foreign scientists. The study of these sources and personal contacts helped him to fully realize and develop his own scientific ideas and to develop existing directions of research. He published more than 70 scientific papers, reflecting a wide variety of scientific interests and numerous and diverse plans. Unfortunately, much of his research remains incomplete. Only one of a series of planned monographs devoted to tundra-forest cover of North-eastern Asia was published—"Ecology of Siberian Dwarf Pine (*Pinus pumila* (Pallas) Regel) in Kamchatka.". This book is a perfect example of scientific production. In 1999 scientists of Kamchatka Institute of Ecology and Natural Resources Management of the FEB RAS published the book "Preservation of Kamchatka Forests", in which provided the some last papers of Dr. Petr Khomentovsky concerning the problems of study, preservation and man-

agement of Kamchatka forests. It contains material on vegetation history and estimation of current state of forest cover on Kamchatka Peninsula. Data on composition and special distribution of common forest communities as well as information on forest exploitation during last 300 years are outlined. The regional features of Kamchatka forest vegetation and its functional role in the ecosystems of the peninsula are analyzed. Petr Khomentovsky devoted much time to scientific-organizational, social and enlightening work. He was the chairman of the Kamchatka Branch of the Geographical Society and the deputy director for science of the Kamchatka Institute of Ecology and Natural Resources Management of the FEB RAS. Dr. Khomentovsky actively participated in the state ecological examination of Kamchatka, and was one of the most active initiators of a system of especially protected natural territories. His authority, sense of civic pride, honesty, and adherence to principles helped him to resist attempted depredations of forests and maltreatment of Kamchatka's natural riches in this difficult period for the country. In a difficult time for Russian science, Dr. Petr Khomentovsky actively continued his work and as a result in 1997 he defended his Doctor's degree dissertation at the Moscow State Forest Institute. Even a few months before his death he was full of creative plans and ideas,—in particular, the ones concerning the connection of scales and rates of variability of vegetation to the planetary power. Moreover, the material, laboratory basis and scientific staff resources he created and helped develop allowed him, despite difficulties, to carry out successfully all of these plans. But fate intervened. Petr Khomentovsky a perfect scientist and a man of high calibre, is not with us anymore. It is a large loss for his relatives, friends, colleagues and World science as a whole.

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