

## TO DR. JANIS RÁCENIS ON HIS 65th BIRTHDAY\*

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A short biography of J. RÁCENIS (born April 10, 1915, Riga, Latvia; teaching and research career mainly at the Universidad Central de Venezuela; founder and director of several scientific institutions in Venezuela) is followed by a list of new odonate taxa he described and by his odonatological bibliography (1953-1979). All of his work is devoted to fauna and taxonomy of the Neotropical Region, and nearly everything known on the Venezuelan dragonflies goes to his credit.



*It was only in the spring of 1979 that I have met Dr. J. Rácenis for the first time in person. The brief period that has elapsed since our first meeting was enough to get to know him as a very hospitable and kind man, but it is in no way sufficient to get more than a small idea of his vast scientific knowledge and experience. This short article, therefore, renders him only inadequately the honors he deserves as the veteran of Venezuelan odonatology. Since November 1979 a serious illness holds him confined to bed and restrains his activities. But, whenever I visit him in his home near Caracas, where he is living with his wife and daughter, he always helps me with dragonfly identifications and, most patiently, answers my beginner's questions. Earlier in 1979, Dr. Rácenis invited me*

\* After this dedication article had been printed, the Editors received a cable from Caracas that Dr. RÁCENIS had passed away at 4 a.m. on April 10, 1980, on his 65th birthday.

several times to the *Facultad de Agronomía* of the *Universidad Central de Venezuela* in Maracay, where a part of his private odonate collection is housed. It consists of some 20.000 mostly neotropical specimens. This huge material includes the types of the taxa described by him, as well as several still undescribed species.

*JANIS (JUAN) RÁCENIS* was born April 10, 1915 in Riga, Latvia. After his baccalaureate in science at the Second State College in Riga he studied at the University of Latvia and received his M.Sc. degree in 1943. In the thirties and forties he worked and published mainly in the field of ornithology. He married GAIDA ANTENS in Bayreuth, German Federal Republic, in 1947, and a year later received his PhD degree in Natural Sciences from the University of Erlangen, in Germany; it was based upon an ornithological thesis. October 1948 he started his career as a Professor of Biology at the *Facultad de Ciencias Físicas y Matemáticas*, *Universidad Central de Venezuela*, in Caracas. His full-time teaching activities ended only with his final retirement in 1976.



Fig. 2. In the office, 1961.

During all these years Dr. Rácenis held a number of leading positions within the University's administration. In addition, he is founder and was head of a number of important national institutions controlled by this university, such as e.g. the '*Escuela de Biología*' and its Department of Zoology (1948), the '*Museo de Biología*' (1949), the journal '*Acta Biologica Venezuelica*' (1951), '*Facultad de Ciencias*' (1958), and the '*Instituto de Zoología Tropical*' (1965). He was also organizer of and participant in numerous scientific expeditions to the Venezuelan interior and to the adjacent countries.

Dr. Rácenis's widespread extra-university professional activities characterize him as a pioneer and promoter of biology and nature conservancy in Venezuela. He was a founding and Board member of the '*Asociación Venezolana para el Avance de la Ciencia*' (1953), a member of the Editorial Board of the '*Boletín del Museo de Ciencias Naturales*', Caracas (1955-1960), served as Technical Assistant at the '*Jardín Zoológico Las Delicias*', Aragua (1957-1958), and participated in the foundation of the Institution for the Study and Conservation of the Lake of Valencia (1958). In the same year, he became head of the Department of Zoology of the '*Museo de Ciencias*

*Naturales*', Caracas. In 1963, we find him among the founders of the Association of Tropical Biology, Inc. (USA), of the 'Museo de Ciencias Naturales del Parque Metropolitano de Valencia', Carabobo, and among those of the hydrobiological station, 'Alfredo Jahn', on the Valencia Lake. From 1963 to 1964 he was board member of the 'Sociedad Venezolana de Ciencias Naturales', and he participated in the foundation of the 'Sociedad Venezolana de Entomología' (1964), which he served as a Board member until 1965. Last but not least, he is an active member of the International Odonatological Society from the very first hour.

It is not surprising that several scientific institutions expressed their appreciation and rendered honors to Dr. Rácenis both in Venezuela and in the United States. He is, or has been a fellow of 27 scientific associations all over the world. A dozen animal species and two genera are named in his honor, among these the aeshnid genus *Racenaeschna* Calvert, 1958.

All of Dr. Rácenis's odonatological work is devoted to the taxonomy and faunistics of the Neotropics. His checklists of the odonate fauna of Peru (1959; 254 spp.) and of Venezuela (1966; 390 spp.) render these two countries the sole South American tropical territories of which a reasonable odonatological documentation is made readily available in a handy, single-volume presentation. There is no doubt that, along with that of Calvert, Fraser, Kennedy, Ris and Williamson, Dr. Rácenis's work represents one of the principal cornerstones of neotropical odonatology.

On behalf of the fellow odonatologists throughout the world, I would like to express to Dr. Rácenis our cordial thanks for all he has done for our discipline, and our warm wishes for his speedy recovery.

#### NEW ODONATE TAXA DESCRIBED BY Dr. J. RÁCENIS (up to December 1979)

##### Protoneuridae

*Epipleoneura fernandezi*, 1960  
*E. machadoi*, 1960  
*E. metallica*, 1955b  
*E. pallida*, 1960  
*E. spatulata*, 1960  
*E. venezuelensis*, 1955b  
*Junix elumbis*, 1968a  
*Neoneura cristina*, 1953b  
*N. gaida*, 1953b

##### Coenagrionidae

*Acanthagrion luteum*, 1958a

*Anisagrion meridionale*, 1953c  
*Chrysobasis buchholzi*, 1959a  
*Hylaeonympha magoi*, 1968a  
*Leptagrion fernandezianum*, 1958a  
*Leucobasis candicans*, 1959a  
*Metaleptobasis fernandezi*, 1955a  
*M. weibezaehni*, 1955a

##### Megapodagrionidae

*Megapodagrion arachne*, 1959b  
*M. lepidum*, 1959b  
*Philogenia ferox*, 1959b  
*Sciutropis cyclanthorum*, 1959b

Polythoridae	<i>A. draco</i> , 1958b
<i>Euthore montgomeryi</i> , 1968b	Corduliidae
Calopterygidae	<i>Neocordulia biancoi</i> , 1970
<i>Hetaerina medinai</i> , 1968b	Libellulidae
<i>H. westfalli</i> , 1968b	<i>Brechmorhoga innupta</i> , 1954b
<i>Iridictyon trebbau</i> , 1968b	<i>Macrothemis guarauno</i> , 1957b
<i>Mnesarete scintilla</i> , 1968b	<i>M. nobilis</i> , 1957b
Gomphidae	<i>M. rupicola</i> , 1957b
<i>Zonophora solitaria</i> , 1970	<i>Nephepeltia leonardina</i> , 1953a
Aeshnidae	
<i>Aeshna andresi</i> , 1958b	

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*Portrait on p. 125 dated 1968.*