

**DIETER ERBER (1933-2004)**  
**A TRIBUTE TO A GERMAN EXPERT ON MADEIRAN BEETLES**

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With 1 figure

Over the last 200 years, several hundred German, Austrian and Swiss naturalists visited Madeira and/or wrote about its fauna and flora – spiders, whales, millipedes, crustaceans, beetles, lizards, molluscs, parasites, fish, and pseudo-scorpions, and algae, mushrooms, ferns, lichens, strawberries, mosses and orchids, just to arbitrarily mention some animals and plants.

However, few visited the archipelago regularly, studied several aspects of the natural phenomena and published the greater part of their results in the *Boletim do Museu Municipal do Funchal (História Natural)* and the *Bocagiana*.

**Visits and work in Madeira**

The Zoologist Michael Schmitt noted that amongst these naturalists was the German born Dieter Erber, a reputed expert on certain groups of beetles, such as Clytrinae and Cryptocephalinae, on which he wrote his PhD thesis (ERBER, 1968; SCHMITT, 2005).

He visited Madeira in March, 1981 and 1982; August, 1983; September, 1985, 1987 and 1988; April, 1990; September, 1992 and 1993; January and February, 1996; September, 2001; and January, 2003.

In his first visit to the archipelago in March, 1981, he visited Madeira and Porto Santo and a year later he came back accompanied by Walter Hinterseher (1), visiting not only Madeira, but also Deserta Grande and Ilhéu Chão. In September, 1988, Dieter

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Erber was in Madeira, Porto Santo and spent some days on Deserta Grande together with Harald Pieper (2) and Christian Lange (3).

Since 1984 he has published 14 or 15 papers, individually or as a co-author, some in German, but mostly in English, on certain beetles of the archipelagos of Madeira and Selvagens (see REFERENCES).

In October, 2003, Dieter Erber did his last talk on the coleopterous fauna of Madeira during the annual meeting of the Coleopterologists of central Europe in Weinstadt-Beutelsbach (FRISCH, 2004: 101).

### **Family, background and profession**

Dieter Erber was born in (Bad) Langensalza, Thüringen, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, 1933 (ERBER, 1968) and died in Gießen on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February, 2004 (ERBER, 2005a).

He was the eldest of two sons of Friedrich Erber (Vienna, 7<sup>th</sup> June, 1904) and Anna Erber, née Dux (Naumburg, Wolfshagen, 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 1907) who married in Naumburg on the 9<sup>th</sup> May, 1932.

He married the teacher Erna Krug (Kassel, 18<sup>th</sup> March, 1933) in Kassel on the 25<sup>th</sup> May, 1958 and had two sons and one daughter – Klaus Erber, Dipl.-Geogr. (Kassel, 5<sup>th</sup> August, 1959), Gudrun Erber, Midwife (Kassel, 17<sup>th</sup> September, 1961) and Hartmut Erber, Nurse (Gießen, 8<sup>th</sup> August, 1963) (ERBER, 2005b).

Between 1939 and 1943 he went to the primary school in Kassel and then the following high schools («Realgymnasien») in Langensalza (1944); in Neukirchen, Ziegenhain (1945 and 1946); in Fritzlar (1946 to 1949) and in Kassel (1949 to 1954) where he did his final examination on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1954.

Until the winter semester of 1956-57 he studied biology, as his main subject in the Pedagogic Institute of Darmstadt in Jugenheim an der Bergstraße, in order to become a primary («Grundschule») and high school («Realschule») teacher.

He also studied botany in the Technical College of Darmstadt. On the 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1957 in Jugenheim, he got his first teaching qualification for the State of Hessen.

He started teaching on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, 1957. For one year he stayed in the municipality of Korbach, in the primary schools of Helmscheid and Hesperinghausen. He was later transferred to Battenberg, Frankenberg an der Eder, where he passed his State Examination for basic and high school teaching in the State of Hessen. Upon a further examination taken in the Pedagogic Institute of Weilburg an der Lahn, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March, 1962, he was appointed high school teacher on the 12<sup>th</sup> July, 1962.

Since the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April, 1962, Dieter Erber held the position of research assistant at the Higher Education School of the Justus Liebig University in Gießen. Between the summer term of 1962 and the winter term of 1966-67, he qualified in Zoology, Botany, Anthropology and Paleontology (ERBER, 1968).

On the 27<sup>th</sup> June, 1967 he got his PhD from the Faculty of Natural Sciences of the University of Gießen. His dissertation was on certain coleopterans of central Europe (ERBER, 1968). He worked at the Institute for Didactic of Biology of the University of Gießen [Study Area («Fachbereich») 08 (Biology, Chemistry and Geosciences)] until his retirement in 1996, where he was graduate high school teacher at university service («Studienrat im Hochschuldienst») from 1970 and senior high school teacher at university service («Oberstudienrat im Hochschuldienst»), from 1971.

Since 1964 he attended meetings of the Working Group of the Coleopterologists of Hessen and since 1979 he was a member of the International Entomological Union. He visited China, Indonesia, Mexico, New Zealand, Pakistan, Peru, South Africa, Sumatra and Tahiti on his entomological research trips.

He donated his collection of Chrysomelidae (16,500 specimens, with 65 types) to the Natural Sciences Museum of Berlin, his Madeiran specimens to the State Museum of Natural Sciences in Stuttgart and the Coleoptera of Hessen to the Senckenberg Museum in Frankfurt (SCHMITT, 2004, 2005; FRISCH, 2004).

### **The man**

Unfortunately I have never met Dieter Erber, although my wife was born in Gießen and has lived for some years in the same street (Spitzwegring) as he lived, but this was before I met her.

In their obituaries, Michael Schmitt (SCHMITT, 2004) and Johannes Frisch (FRISCH, 2004) noted at his talk, in October 2003, just five months before his death at the Annual Meeting of the Coleopterologists of central Europe held in Weinstadt-Beutelsbach, that he looked remarkably well. They described him as a charming colleague, professor and dedicated coleopterologist who, in many fields, had achieved great feats. He loved his profession, taught with enthusiasm and knew how to motivate his biology students. He was an outstanding professor, not only due to his didactic skills, but also due to his solid zoological and botanical knowledge.

He was a nature lover and a keen mountaineer. As a dedicated coleopterologist he brought very interesting entomological collections from poorly studied regions and generously shared these with his colleagues for description.

### Notes

The medical doctor and zoologist (expert in entomology) Dr. med. Walter Hinterseher (born in Bad Hersfeld on 10<sup>th</sup> April, 1947) visited the archipelago of Madeira in January and February of 1973, March, 1982 and July-August, 1996. Between 1988 and 1992 he co-authored three papers with D. Erber.

The zoologist Dr. rer. nat. Harald Pieper (born in Berlin on 21<sup>st</sup> February, 1942) first visited Madeira in September, 1979 and the eleven more times until 1994. Between 1981 and 1990 he published four papers on Madeiran animals, three in the *Bocagiana* and one in *Boletim do Museu Municipal do Funchal (História Natural)*.

The zoologist (expert in entomology) Dipl.-Biol. Dr. Christian Lange, from Wiesbaden, was in Madeira from August until October, 1986, from July until September, 1988 and in April and May, 1989. Between 1990 and 1991 he published three papers on insects of Madeira.



Dieter Erber (1933-2004)  
[Photograph by Ulrich Kirschbaum]

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