

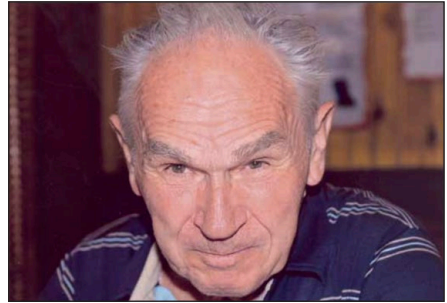
Dr Aleš Smetana was an internationally renowned expert on the taxonomy and systematics of several families of beetles, mainly rove beetles and water scavenger beetles (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae, Hydrophilidae). These beetles are important worldwide as predators and decomposers in a wide variety of terrestrial manmade and natural ecosystems. He was so deeply and broadly connected to the Coleopterist community (especially our tight-knit ‘family’ of staphylinidologists — ‘rove beetle people’) that it still feels incredibly strange to imagine a world without Aleš, who had productively continued working at his office each day, and every year attended the various beetle taxonomy meetings in Europe to share stories, science, exciting new specimens and good wine.

Aleš passed away on 25 August 2021 at 90 years old. He is survived by his wife Lise, three sons Dan, Tom and David, and his grandchildren Kevin, Chelsea, Ryan, Evan, Cameron and Nolan.

Aleš was known for his love of high-performance automobiles, volleyball and keeping fit, cultivating exotic plants, foraging for mushrooms, an expansive knowledge of Latin and other languages (Czech, German, English), and honest and open opinions about scientific practice and philosophy. He was a role model for any working in entomology, in his work ethic, aspiration for correctness, and enthusiasm for the subject, but he was also a model of gentlemanly behaviour and political correctness, and was always willing to help with problems of all kinds. As a testament to his proficiency in languages, and creative, honest personality, he once wrote a carefully constructed article in French (far from his native tongue) critiquing recent beetle classifications by a French colleague, which he argued relied too heavily on male genitalia, calling the practice ‘the cult of the aedeagus’!

Aleš was a true giant in his field and was constantly breaking ‘new ground’ in poorly known beetle groups, especially his beloved staphylinids. Many of his monographs represented the first modern inroads for a given group in North America, Himalaya, Taiwan and China, and were critical for the success of later phylogenetic and applied studies, in which he was also an important collaborator. His love of adventure led him to collect irreplaceable samples from the wilderness of the Canadian North, Russia, Himalaya, Taiwan, Japan, Borneo and later, China. In total, Aleš published 472 papers or books on beetles, describing 34 genera and 973 species that are still considered valid. In recognition of his impact, Aleš has at least five genera and at least a whopping 264 species named after him.

Aleš was born 6 April 1931 in Kralove, Czechoslovakia. At the age of 10, he had already started collecting beetles and by 13, he had brought home a bag full of the inner contents of an ant nest (*Formica rufa*), from which he sorted out beetles in the living room — much to his mother’s dismay (Farkač and Löbl, 2011)! This enthusiastic and early start was nurtured by his supportive father, Dr Oldřich Smetana, who was a medical doctor and a bibliophile who bought classic European books for him, such as Reitter’s Fauna Germanica. Later, when Aleš was a fully-fledged entomologist, his father accompanied him on field excursions around Europe, including Slovakia,



L. Smetana

Aleš Smetana (1931–2021)

Aleš in Verona, Italy (2010).

¹This reference contributed much of the following information on Aleš’ early life

Austria and Romania. One can hardly imagine a better start for a budding taxonomist!

Aleš studied at Charles University (Prague, Czech Republic) for his undergraduate degree and obtained a medical degree from the same institution in 1956. Combining his love of entomology with new training in medicine, he joined the Institute of Parasitology (Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, Prague) and successfully defended a C.Sc. [Soviet-era equivalent of a PhD.] thesis on the taxonomy and systematics of Anoplura ['sucking lice'] of Czechoslovakia. Some years later, he joined the virology unit of the same institute, researching the transmission of arboviruses via ticks and mosquitoes. During this period, Aleš simultaneously continued his taxonomic work on beetles, already participating in a variety of foreign collecting trips with such eminent European Coleopterists as W.O. Steel, I. Löbl, G. Lohse and G. Benick.

Aleš' Canadian life began in 1967, when he starting working at the Canadian National Collection of Insects, Arachnids and Nematodes (CNC, then 'Entomology Research Institute') as a National Research Council of Canada postdoctoral fellow. During this short 2-year period, he produced a comprehensive monograph on North American Quediini rove beetles (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae: Staphylininae) that was later (Smetana 1971) published in the Entomological Society of Canada's Memoir Series. In the same 2 years, he also extensively sampled North America, including all Canadian provinces and territories (except Newfoundland, Nunavut and the Maritimes), and much of the western and southeastern United States. This incredibly valuable baseline, laid down in only 2 years' time, is only matched in the CNC Coleoptera, especially staphylinids, by Aleš' later collecting efforts, together with colleagues such as Milt Campbell. Upon seeing his unpublished monograph on Quediini, the director of the institute was apparently so impressed that he was committed to ensure Aleš would return as a permanent employee.

Fortunately, Aleš did return and began working officially as Research Scientist at the Central Experimental Farm on 23 September 1971 (Figure 1). He was appointed to work on the poorly known North American diversity of the terrestrial water scavenger beetles (Hydrophilidae), alongside which he continued work on rove beetles, also greatly in need of taxonomic attention in North America. During his appointment at the CNC, Aleš drove massive growth of the beetle collection, with numerous expeditions to Canada and the United States (1970–1980s), the Himalaya of Nepal (five yearly trips 1981–1985) (Figure 2), Japan (1980, 1991), Taiwan (1990, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1995) (Figure 3) and later, albeit self-funded, multiple trips to China. In support of the trip to Japan in 1991, Aleš was the recipient of a visiting scientist grant from the Natural History Museum of Chiba, Japan. For about 15 years, Aleš served as Curator of Coleoptera at the CNC. Amongst a multitude of other papers, Aleš completed a series of comprehensive monographs and their supplements on North American hydrophilids (Plate 1A) and staphylinids (Plate 1B–C), many of which were published with the ESC. In 1986, Aleš described a new genus and species of Alaskan Leptotyphlinae (Plate 1D), a group of blind, minute (<2 mm) and flightless rove beetles that live



Canadian National Insect Collection

Figure 1. The 'Coleoptera Coffee Club' in the Coleoptera Unit of the Canadian National Collection of Insects, Arachnids and Nematodes, AAFC. From left to right: Go Sato, Don Bright, Ed Becker, Aleš Smetana. No date recorded.

strictly in unglaciated regions of the world, generally deep in soil and thought to be highly sensitive to harsh conditions. This discovery was remarkable as Alaska was the last place we would have expected these beetles to exist! Other landmark publications include monographs on the Quediini rove beetles of the Himalaya (1988) and Taiwan (1995). In total, Aleš published over 288 research papers, books and large monographs before his retirement, many of which are regularly cited in diverse papers on taxonomy, climate change and natural resources ecology, conservation, biocontrol and archaeology (subfossil deposits in association with humans). Aleš was also a major contributor to *The Canadian Entomologist* and its associated publications, with 19 publications describing 179 species-group and 14 genus group names (Bouchard et al. 2018).

Aleš 'retired' 28 years later in 1999 but continued to work each day at his office as an Honorary Research Associate. During this time as an HRA, Aleš focused his research to the then nearly unknown rove beetle fauna of China, especially the Staphylininae (Plate 1E–G) but also the Omaliinae (Plate 1H), which he often jointly published with Alexey Shavrin (Russia).

Aleš continued to make collecting trips with colleagues to China in 2000, 2002 and 2005. From 1999–2021, Aleš published an incredible 184 additional papers, a significant portion of which contributed toward the comprehensive book 'The quediine subtribes of mainland China' (Smetana 2017). Another major accomplishment during his retirement was his involvement as co-editor and contributor to the critical resource 'Catalog of Palaearctic Coleoptera' in eight volumes (2004–2013; e.g., Löbl and Smetana 2004), for which he received a medal for outstanding achievement at the 20th Symposium Internationale Entomofaunisticum Europae Centralis in Cluj, Romania (2008); he later coauthored the rove beetle chapter in the second edition (2015). These catalogs, representing a gargantuan amount of work, provide authoritative information on all scientific names ever published for species occurring in Europe, the Middle East, temperate Asia and Russia.

At every stage in his career, Aleš made a bold and lasting impression on both science and his peers. He is deeply missed by many friends of both the 'younger' and 'older' generations, who have lately shared their wonderful stories on social media or through email. There is no doubt that Aleš has left behind a legacy of both invaluable specimens and fond memories.

Adam Brunke and Anthony Davies (Ottawa, Ontario)

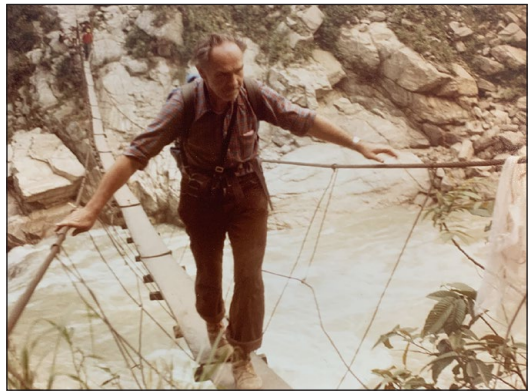


Figure 2. Crossing the Arun River (Nepal) by foot bridge. 1980s [exact date unknown].



Figure 3. Collecting on Hsin-kangshan, southern Taiwan (April, 1998).

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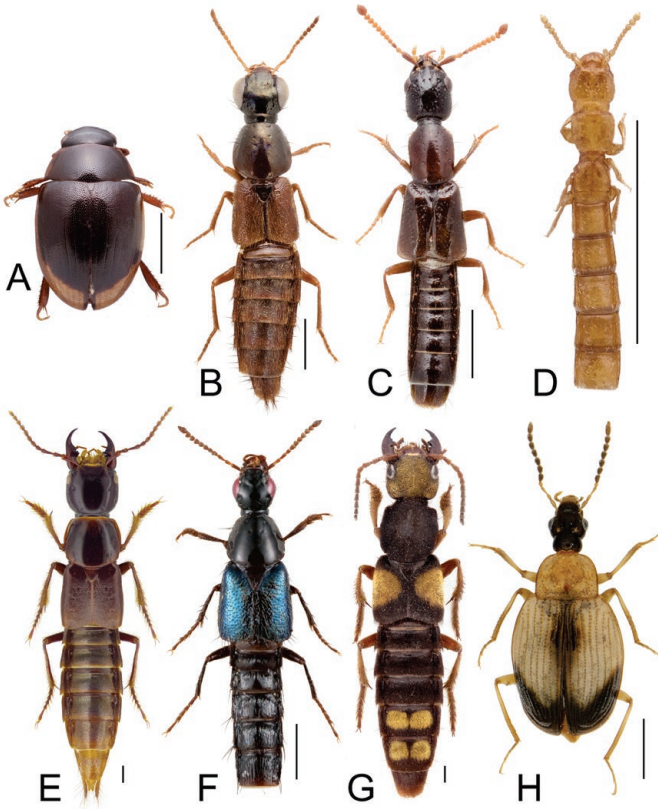


Plate 1. Genera and species described by Aleš Smetana. A) *Cercyon cinctus* Smetana (Hydrophilidae), a distinctive, transcontinental Nearctic species; B) *Quedius vulpinus* Smetana, a rare western Nearctic species, living in moss; C) *Oxybleptes kiteleyi* Smetana, — *Oxybleptes* Smetana is endemic to eastern North America and its sexually dimorphic species form mysterious swarms in Fall; D) *Chionotyphlus alaskensis* Smetana — *Chionotyphlus* Smetana is a relictual genus restricted to the loess soils of small, unglaciated parts of Alaska; E) *Quelaestrygon puetzi* Smetana — *Quelaestrygon* Smetana is an enigmatic and phylogenetically isolated Chinese genus that now represents its own tribe; F) *Anthosaurus caelestis* Smetana — *Anthosaurus* Smetana is an Oriental genus that has diverged from its predatory ancestors to feed on the pollen of flowering trees; G) *Agelosus nigricollis* Smetana, an attractive Chinese species; H) *Trigonodemus schuelkei* Smetana, from China, is one of the most striking species of this mushroom-associated genus. Scale = 1 mm.