

Preface

Inga Hedberg has been the backbone of *Symbolae Botanicae Uppsalienses* for four decades. Last year she decided that she needed a break. As the new editors, we would like to honour her devotion by dedicating our first issue to her.

Her Festschrift includes contributions from her students, coauthors and collaborators, and – in recognition of her broad interests – it covers a wide variety of subjects.

We first give the floor to Mariette Manktelow, for a brief summary of Inga's career from a young woman to maturity.

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Magnus Lidén & David Morrison

The first time I met Professor Inga Hedberg I was 17 years old. She and her husband, Professor Olov Hedberg, were supervising our secondary school project, a botanical inventory of Linnaeus' Hammarby near Uppsala. It was a meeting that was to determine my own life goals. Inspired by this vivid couple, so engaged in their work and eager to share their knowledge, I decided to study systematic botany, with focus on African plants. I soon understood that I was not alone. Inga has, with her enthusiasm, her ability to catch people's interest and her care for young people and their needs, attracted many students to systematic botany.

Inga and Olov Hedberg — it is difficult not to refer to them as a pair. They worked together and were mentioned together. But here I will try to single out Inga Hedberg, as I have known her in a three-decade long collegueship and friendship.

Inga Hedberg was born Inga Holmbäck on the 18th of November 1927, in Luleå in the province of Norrbotten in northern Sweden. Very early she became interested in biology and genetics. This was due to Maj Fahlander,

her teacher in mathematics, and Maj's husband Kjell Fahlander. Inga was often invited to their home, where they had inspiring discussions. Kjell Fahlander had taken his doctor's degree at Uppsala University in 1938. He suggested that, with Inga's interest in genetics, she should study in Uppsala. Just like Carl Linnaeus' parents were convinced by Carl's teacher to let him study medicine, Kjell Fahlander convinced young Inga's parents that it was a good idea that she would study genetics in Uppsala.

Inga arrived in Uppsala in the autumn of 1950, aiming for a Master of Science (Fil. mag.) in genetics. Her first course was rather tedious. However, she worked hard and after six long weeks she changed to the next course, taught by Gösta Lindeberg. He was a well of inspiration and joy, and Inga continued with new courage and enthusiasm. Her skills were soon recognised by her teachers. She got an offer to do a Ph.D. on forest litter, but she turned the offer down, as she was focused on a career in genetics.

A couple of years later she was offered a temporary position as a teacher in biology at Luleå Secondary School (Läroverket), where

she herself had studied just a few years earlier. She accepted, and the headmaster told her that there was only one problem: her class consisted of 32 boys, and boys only. “But since Miss Holmbäck seems to be a tough young lady, I am sure this will pose no problem”. Only slightly older than her pupils, she managed to establish very good contact with the boys and received great respect from them. Already at this young age we see her courage, warmth and sense of order.

After some time she returned to Uppsala, where she met Olov Hedberg, 4 years her senior. Already during her first year in Uppsala she had read in the local newspaper about this student, who had travelled to the East African Mountains only 23 years old. “I would like to meet this person”, she thought. This was soon to happen, first at a dance arranged by the Philochorus Dance Association, and later in Lindholm’s dinner hall. They talked about genetics, which turned out to be a shared favourite subject. They vividly discussed an essay of hers, and scribbled on the table cloth to make their points.

Following a suggestion from Olov, Inga chose the genus *Anthoxanthum* for her Ph.D. study in genetics, first at the University of Agricultural Sciences, but soon she asked to be transferred to the Department of Systematic Botany at Uppsala University, where Olov was doing his PhD. The era of the Hedbergs began.

They married in 1953, spending part of their honeymoon at a scientific congress at Oxford University. They had five children: Per, Bengt, Göran, Björn and Maria. With a full family to care for, Inga carried on with her Ph.D. study in *Anthoxanthum* and helped out with Olov’s research. They brought the children with them into the field, both in Africa and Sweden, with the aim that each one of them should have a personal relationship to nature. The family often went together to London, combining sightseeing with herbarium studies at Kew.

Inga and Olov Hedberg did all their work together, even where only one or the other’s name is today evident. This includes herbarium collections as well as publications. It was never a matter who had done what – they were a team. When Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia called Olov to receive an honorary doctor’s degree, he refused to accept it without Inga by his side, as she was his scientific partner and peer, and they had done all their scientific work together.

Inga took her PhD in 1970 based on the dissertation “Cytotaxonomic studies on *Anthoxanthum odoratum* L. s. lat.”, which was published in the series *Symbolae Botanicae Upsalienses*.

With her sense of order, her language skills, and her discipline she later worked as the editor of this journal for 40 years. Many of us students at the Department gained our proof reading skills, deadline discipline, and an extended English vocabulary wholly due to Inga.

Inga has devoted her life to conservation of tropical forest and vegetation, especially in Africa. She has been tireless in letting her voice be heard in many contexts, inspiring a stream of students from many countries, and being an active part in a number of publications. Her and Olov’s work on African biodiversity and conservation is an invaluable fundament.

Some of her achievements should be mentioned here, such as the *Flora of Ethiopia and Eritrea*, involving 90 researchers from 17 different countries, finally finished in 2009. She has given uncountable talks to stress the need for systematic botany in order to know and save the vegetation of the world, be it in The Association for the Taxonomic Study of the Flora of Tropical Africa (AETFAT), in a school class room, or in the Vatican. She organized the first education of Ph.D. students in systematic botany from the species-rich countries Ethiopia and Tanzania. She initiated the Ethnobotany courses at Uppsala University, and together with Olov she carried out scientific work on the afroalpine vegetation.

Retirement did not slow down the pace for Inga and Olov. Professor Olov Hedberg passed away in 2007, and Inga has continued their engagement in systematic botany and nature conservation, now as a senior researcher at the Department and a regular visitor to the AETFAT symposia in Africa. She is still a well of inspiration, and although I did not see her as a young teacher in Luleå, I bet that she has not changed a bit since then. We who have the privilege to see her regularly can bear witness to a warm person and a wonderful friendship.

I am proud and grateful to count Inga Hedberg among my friends and colleagues, a person who has ignited so many scientists' careers, enforced the forest conservation issue with such courage, and raised the discipline of ethnobotany at Uppsala University. I see similarities to Carl Linnaeus, not only in the beginning of Inga's career, but also in its summing up. Her work has given echo far beyond our country's border, and is of ever-lasting value.

Mariette Manktelow 2016

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chronological under each subheading

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