

# Mediterranean Botany

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## In Memoriam, Juan Carlos Báscones Carretero

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When we were still assimilating the recent death in Barcelona of our friend and colleague Ramón Masalles on October 9, the news arrived of Juan Carlos's death just five days later. Despite everything, that short period was enough for Juan Carlos to dedicate a beautiful epitaph to our Catalan colleague, which has been disseminated by the Span-

ish Society of Geobotany. The task of writing an obituary for a dear friend is painful, but it is at the same time honorable, so I set about it with determination and emotion, to provide a written account of who Juan Carlos Báscones Carretero was as a person and as a contributor to botanical science and the conservation of biodiversity in Spain.

He was born in the mining town of San Salvador del Valle (now Trapagaran, Biscay) at the end of the post-war period. There he enjoyed a wild and happy early childhood in a semi-urban environment that allowed him to have intimate contact with nature until his family moved to Bilbao. There he completed his high school studies at the Santiago Apóstol school ruled by the De La Salle Brothers, at the end of which he moved to Pamplona to study Biological Sciences at the University of Navarre, a degree that he completed in 1972.

Throughout his student period, he always stood out as an outstanding pupil, so at the end of his degree he had the opportunity to join the Department of Botany of his Faculty of Sciences in the team of Prof. María Luisa López Fernández since 1972. Later in 1978 he was appointed Assistant Professor of Botany until 1985. In his 13 years of academic dedication at the University of Navarre, he was in charge of subjects such as Botany, Ecology, and Plant Ecology. He carried out intense work in the training of biologists with a specialization in botany, mainly in the fields of Geobotany and Ecology. He developed a new way of working in these areas within the context of that department, seeking to establish relationships and contacts to facilitate collaboration and integration into networks of colleagues. Thus, he actively participated in various congresses and in the activities of

the Spanish Association of Phytosociology (AEFA), the Société Botanique de France, and others.

His teaching work was completed with the direction of dissertations and doctoral theses that served to give a transcendental boost to the knowledge of the flora and vegetation of Navarre. Although his main line of work was the cataloging of vascular flora and the phytosociological study of vegetation, he also dealt with other specialties of Botany, even co-directing PhDs on bryophytes and lichens, which helped train researchers in these areas, like Alicia Ederra and Javier Etayo. He supervised the PhD of Luis Miguel Medrano Moreno *Flora and vegetation of the Sierras of Demanda and Cameros (La Rioja)* in 1995 and participated very actively in those of Carmen Ursúa and Javier Peralta.

The university full contract period ended in 1985 but his academic work does not end with his leaving the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Navarre as he was later engaged through part time contracts by several academic institutions. Is the case of his position as Associate Professor of Biology at the Technical School of Agricultural Engineers of Villava, from 1988 to 1990. He was also committed as Professor of the Experience Classroom of the Public University of Navarre on the Pamplona and Tudela campuses from 2007 to 2019, teaching classes on current environmental and territorial planning issues. Finally, from 2010 to 2016 he was Associate Professor at the Higher Technical School of Architecture of the University of Navarre in the specialization of Landscape and Environment and meanwhile participated in numerous university master's degrees as a guest professor.

After finishing the university full contract period, he won a position as an official of the Environmental Service in the Government of Navarre. At that time, the powers of the Autonomous Community had just been received and everything remained to be done. Thanks to his university scientific training in Botany and Ecology, to which he added the knowledge of the Navarrese fauna that he acquired for this purpose, he was able to promote the creation and development of the Network of Protected Natural Areas of the Foral Community and its catalogs of threatened flora and fauna. His work between 1985 and 1998 also enabled the implementation of the current regulatory and management instruments for nature conservation in Navarre. In this period, the

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application of the EU Habitats Directive took place, in which Juan Carlos warned of a great opportunity for the expansion of the network of protected areas. Between 2004 and 2011 he worked in the Department of Territorial Planning of the Autonomous Government as Technical Coordinator of the Territorial Planning Plans.

His research career began with his Doctoral Thesis, which was defended in 1978 under the title: *Soil-vegetation relationships of humid northwestern Navarre. A floristic-ecological study*, which was supervised by Dr. Pedro Montserrat Recoder. Since 1977, his more than 70 publications faithfully reflect his life and professional career, as there are a significant number of scientific works that address different aspects, such as vascular flora, vegetation, and even bryology or mycology, which are the result of his research carried out alone or in collaboration with pupils and colleagues. There is no shortage of dissemination works and contributions in the field of conservation biology for ecosystems and species. Juan Carlos's latest publication is "Fluvial Flora of the Bidasoa Basin" in 2019, with a clear didactic orientation.

He married Carmen Ursúa Sesma in 1991, also a botanist who specialized in vegetation with whom he had two children: Carlos and Ana. Carmen has been an inseparable companion and very close collaborator in Juan Carlos's life, so she has accompanied him in his scientific career in field sampling campaigns and also professionally, as a member of the staff of the Department of the Environment of the Government of Navarre, where both have carried out their professional activity until their retirement.

Pleasant memories come to mind of when, together with Carmen, we traveled throughout Navarre studying

the *Genista occidentalis* thickets, the holm oak forests, the heaths, or the vegetation series of the Old Kingdom. They were very fruitful years in which formidable progress was achieved in the knowledge of the vegetation of Navarre after a series of publications. This era culminated with the appearance of the works *Vegetation of the Western Pyrenees and Navarre*, and the *Vegetation Series of Navarre*, both works that were carried out collectively and in which Juan Carlos had a fundamental participation. They summarize the knowledge of the terrestrial ecosystems of the involved territory and are, even today, reference documents in the field of its vegetation and ecosystems.

His commitment to botanical science and the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems was inalienable, to the point that there were occasions when he was professionally harmed. His work in the environmental management body of the Navarrese Government has been very relevant since his administrative efficiency was combined with his scientific training, overwhelmingly documented and impregnated with a critical spirit. It was a frequent comment among us, his colleagues, how extraordinary and advantageous it was for Navarre to have an official with such high training and such firm judgment in the field of biodiversity and the environment.

His demeanor was extremely kind and polite. In the long years in which I had a relationship with him, I never heard any rude expressions or bad words from him. His manners were exquisite, like those of an old-school gentleman, so he always created a cordial and respectful atmosphere around him.

Rest In Peace