"Legyünk büszkék arra, amik voltunk, s ígykezzünk különbe lenni annál, amik vagyunk!"

"Let us take pride in what we were, and try to be better than what we are."

Ottó Herman Memorial Year

Hungary commemorates the 100th anniversary of the death of the natural scientist, ethnographer, linguist, archeologist and politician, the last Hungarian polymath Ottó Herman (1835-1914)
His name and iconic, easily recognizable figure with a long grey beard are familiar to most Hungarians. His multifaceted work retains its relevance to the present day. This multi-talented Renaissance man, born in Breznóbánya (Brezno, Slovakia), left behind a legacy so varied and timeless that even a lifetime may seem too short for creating it.

His bibliography contains some 1140 items, mostly scientific works in zoology, ethnography, archeology and linguistics. His encyclopedic style work, *Advantages and Disadvantages of Birds* is a standard for all Hungarian school children. His work *The Book of Hungarian Fishing*, illustrated with his own wonderful drawings, is acknowledged all over the world. He wrote the historical summary and dictionary of Hungarian livestock breeding, and did a complete classification of the fauna of Hungarian spiders. He was also an internationally acclaimed ornithologist, founder of the Hungarian Ornithology Centre and his initiative made "Birds and Trees Day" into an official Hungarian holiday.

His controversial theory on the existence of a prehistoric culture in the Pannonian Basin was verified by later research. Despite his German origins, from childhood on he considered himself Hungarian and later Hungarianised his name. He was an active and excellent lecturer and national public figure throughout his life. After 1848 he fought for Hungary’s independence in national movements in Italy and Poland. His ancestry, the stations in his life and work connect him to the peoples of the Pannonian Basin.

Above and beyond these facts, why should this open-hearted fighter and uncompromising character be honoured and popularized?

The **Ottó Herman Memorial Year** intends to address this question. Antal Vida, head of the **Environmental Protection and Nature Conservation Department** at the **National Institute for Environment** proposed the idea for the Memorial Year. It is organized by Hungary’s National Institute for the Environment. Its aim is to present new, lesser-known aspects of **Ottó Herman’s** life-work. This remarkable scientist and politician left behind an imperishable legacy. His character and work provide an enduring example - reminding us that talent and inspired work in a variety of fields and the quest for universal knowledge, in fact might be the only way to gain an understanding of the diverse world around us.
The **Ottó Herman Memorial Year** began on 4th February 2014, with an opening ceremony held at Budapest’s Millenáris Teátrum, and will close on 27th December, commemorating the 100th anniversary of Ottó Herman’s death. The National Institute for the Environment has organized an impressively varied and memorable program continuing through December and befitting the work of our versatile polymath.

The official opening of the Memorial Year held on February 4th was a unique cultural experience.

The internationally renowned Muzsikás Ensemble gave a festive concert presenting traditional music and dances evoking pastoral life in the Pannonian Basin. The concert paid homage to Ottó Herman’s scientific works on the ancient traditional herder’s occupations, his ethnographic and artistic illustrations of musical instruments, and his passion for folk music. The event was open to the public and free of charge aiming to make this unique musical celebration of this aspect of Ottó Herman’s work and spirit available to as wide an audience as possible.

The program for the **Ottó Herman Memorial Year** includes commemorations and placement of laurel wreaths at a number of important memorial sites, and Vérmező – a Budapest park with the Ottó Herman memorial drinking fountain; his birthplace in Breznóbánya (now Brezno, Slovakia); Miskolc, where he began his studies and spent important periods of his life; Szeged, where he was elected political representative, and other sites.

The year-long program, like the scope of Ottó Herman’s widespread interests and activities, covers a number of regions and places; addressing all generations through a variety of channels. The long list of the cooperating partners and venues includes Hungarian national parks, museums, memorials and cultural festivals.

The **Ottó Herman Memorial Year** provides opportunities to brush up on what we already know and expand our knowledge. It invites us to a colourful cultural journey full of new experiences - a journey to inspire all eternally active minds. The Memorial Year offers connections to vital questions of our times and a chance for introspection.