„Legyünk büszkék arra, amik voltunk, s igyekezzünk különbek 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

A series of programs held by the National Institute for Environment celebrating the 100th anniversary of the death of scientist, journalist, politician Ottó Herman – the last Hungarian polymath
Commemorating our great ancestors on important anniversaries of their deaths is an old tradition. For the greatest ones, commemoration may take the form of a memorial year. 1960 was the memorial year for the 125th anniversary of Ottó Herman’s birth. This year we remember him on the 100th anniversary of his death.

The dates of Ottó Herman’s birth and death mark important events in the Memorial Year. However, as it turned out, the information on these important times was somewhat vague.

When we began planning the Memorial Year, all we had was one drawing of the house in Brezno (now Brezno, Slovakia) where Ottó Herman was born. At the time we didn’t know that not even the experts knew the exact location of the house depicted in the drawing which was done not long before his death. Using a well known virtual map we wandered the streets of Brezno, going house by house on the web trying to find the birthplace of the great scientist and see if a commemorative plaque marked the house. At last we found a house at the corner of the market square that corresponded to the house in the drawing on the basis of its proportions and at least 15 decorative elements.

Ottó Herman had kept his Brezno origin secret until the year of his death. The drawing was done by one of his acquaintances who came upon the house by chance. We were surprised that the exact birthplace of one of the greatest Hungarian scientists was unknown and that there was nothing marking the house where he was born. It is amazing that the house survived two world wars or hadn’t been razed for construction of the residential complexes that erased the past once and for all.

We will mark this house with a trilingual (German, Slovakian and Hungarian) commemorative plaque during the Memorial Year. We are planning to unveil the plaque on June 26th – Ottó Herman’s birthday – in Brezno, a city in present-day Slovakia.

Identifying his last home in Budapest – where he died in 1914 – was equally as challenging. The literature refers to Krisztna Boulevard 91, which is today a building built sometime in the 1930s. Having located his first home in Brezno, we hoped to find his last home too. However it was suspicious that Kálmán Lambrecht, the author of the book we used as a source, omitted the house number in editions of his book that came out after

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About the Ottó Herman Memorial Year...
the first edition from 1925. As it turned out, the house numbering had been reversed and when public places were renamed, the building that had once been Kristina Boulevard 91, now had the address of Magyar Jakobinus Square 1. So, we had found the house. It is our pleasure to announce that, according to the archival sources, the building we found at that address is the one that was there when Ottó Herman died. So, at dawn on the anniversary of his death, December 27th, 2014, this building shall be marked with a commemorative plaque as well.

The 100th anniversary of Ottó Herman’s death calls for a discreet, informal, quiet commemoration on the exact day, hour and place. We welcome everyone in the appropriate frame of mind to the early morning commemoration at Vérmező for a cup of hot tea, opposite the building where Ottó Herman died. Midday Sipos will play the violin, ‘Light… to the window…’ – he said. They pushed his bed to the window and he died there in the first light of the winter dawn…”

(www.facebook.com/hermanottoev)

There are numerous statues, reliefs and plaques in Hungary commemorating Ottó Herman. We have done our best to catalogue all of these. We will restore and lay wreathes at the memorials in Pest, Buda, Miskolc, Szeged, Győr, Pécs, Orfű, Budakeszi and Közeg among others, as well as his grave in Miskolc-Hámor. In Hámor, no major changes will be made; we will give the grave and its surroundings a festive look, worthy of the personality of the great scholar and the occasion. On the anniversary of his death, 27th December, we will pay our respects at the festively decorated grave site with an all-day program. In connection with the Memorial Year, we are publishing a new, special edition of Dimónkos Varga’s excellent book on Ottó Herman’s life as well as a workbook for school children entitled: On the path of Ottó Herman’ with eyes wide open. We want to supply copies of both books to all Hungarian elementary and secondary schools. We have also developed roll-up educational materials for “Ottó Herman Educational Trail” school programs. We present the variety of this great scholar’s interests, his achievements and his quest for the truth and knowledge as an example worth following; condensing it with ‘discovery learning’ an educational method gaining popularity in Hungarian education. These entertaining educational materials and programs are planned for circulation in schools all over Hungary during the Memorial Year.

Ottó Herman was amongst the first Hungarian natural scientists who did his own masterful illustrations to accompany his works. He also did splendid and accurate drawings for his colleagues. The journal he founded contained colourful illustrations. It is important for scientists to illustrate their findings. We will demonstrate his illustration process in an exhibition that will also illustrate nature’s amazing diversity. This exhibition is scheduled to travel to several locations.

Ottó Herman’s work aimed at preserving traditional values will be presented at a number of major Hungarian festivals. An exhibition of large prints of his beautiful freehand drawings, reconstruction and live demonstrations of ancient fishing tools and methods and presentation of his important work, The Book of Hungarian Fishing. Some fifty programs are scheduled to take place at national parks. There is a full calendar of events and an array of other programs during the Memorial Year. Events include contests, commemorations, academic lectures and publications sponsored by cultural institutions and civil organizations. Information on the programs can be found in Hungarian at the website (www.hermanottoomleke.hu) and our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/hermanottoev).

With the Memorial Year we hope to revive the memory of this likeable and spirited character from the past whose creative mind and adventurous life are still an inspiration and offer us plenty to learn from.

The life, personality, working methods and patriotism of Ottó Herman remain a stellar example of lasting relevance. His popularity is undiminished and a living tradition keeps his memory alive.

Though others have been called ‘the last Hungarian polymath’, Ottó Herman truly earned this title because – even though his formal schooling was interrupted at the secondary level – his multifaceted work is a legacy of enduring value.

His work in zoology encompassed the study of locusts, spiders, fish and birds and their migration. His ethno graphic work examined the ancient traditional occupations of fishing and herding. An excellent paleoarchaeologist, he identified the prehistoric man of Bukk, and fought as passionately for its recognition, as he did as a linguist against the excesses of the neologists. He collected the traditional vocabulary of fishing and herding, and worked with transferring these Hungarian expressions to the scientific language. Journalism, dissemination of knowledge, photography, artistic depiction of nature and ethnographic illustrations of traditional musical instruments - were all important throughout his career.

He was born in Breznóbánya (today, Brezno in Slovakia) and despite his German origins, from childhood he identified with and considered himself Hungarian. He began learning the Hungarian language at the age of seven. He changed his name to Ottó Herman from Carl Otto Herrmann. He went to school in Miskolc. His interest in nature, and most of all in birds, came from his father’s side of the family. This interest and his vast knowledge later won him a job as a museologist in Transylvania at the Kolozsvár Museum.

He and Sámuel Brassai (known as the ‘last Transylvanian polymath’) became central personalities in Kolozsvár cultural life and this is where he met and fell in love with Mari Jászai, an actress of rare natural talent.
He received recognition in professional circles for his three-volume book “Hungary’s spider fauna” written in Hungarian and German on a grant from the Royal Hungarian Society of Natural Science.
He was soon hired by the National Museum in Budapest as a zoologist. While studying the fish of Hungary’s Lake Balaton, he discovered that the ancient working practices, tools and language of the fishermen were in danger of disappearing.

Thus began his lasting interest in fishing. He wrote “The book of Hungarian fishing”, a work in two volumes spanning a thousand pages. Later on he did extensive work collecting the practices and customs of the livestock herders, a traditional occupation that had also begun to disappear. He made many other important contributions to the literature of Hungarian ethnography.

As a politician he favoured independence and admired Kossuth, who was never idle when it came to speaking in defense of his nation. Ottó Herman’s iconic figure with his long beard had become well known by this time.

He also became a target for caricaturists, which he accepted with wise humour. He himself also excelled at doing caricatures of others.

During the celebrations of Hungary’s Millennium (1896), he presented an exhibition on the ancient occupation of Hungarian fishing in a highly successful pavilion. The present day Hungarian Museum of Agriculture in Budapest’s city park owes its existence to that initiative.

He founded the Hungarian Centre for Ornithology, which later became the Hungarian Institute for Ornithology and organized a successful international congress. His best-known book in popular science, “The advantages and disadvantages of birds”, was first published in 1901, and has been reprinted several times in the last decades. Its descriptions of birds are in a beautiful and easily understandable Hungarian.

Birds and Trees Day, initiated by him, is still celebrated every year in Hungary.

He published his “Vocabulary of the Hungarian shepherds”, an 800 page volume, at the age of 79, the year of his death. It was an excellent closing to a life of superhuman achievement. Though his works were published mainly in Hungarian, some were published in other languages. He was recognized in his time in European professional circles and, among other things, he was decorated as a knight of the French Legion of Honour.

His list of works includes 14 books - some 1140 items - including his published research and lectures. His illustrations, the journals and civil organizations related to his name, the scientific centre, museum, numerous streets named after him, the statues and plaques dedicated to him - all bear witness to, and cherish the memory and the everlasting legacy of an extraordinary and exemplary human being.
The following question may well arise: Why exactly did folk music and folk dance have such an important role at the opening ceremony for the Ottó Herman Memorial Year?

Well, the last Hungarian polymath was interested in almost all aspects of life, but only a few know that, despite his poor hearing, he was also interested in folk music. He studied pastoral life and published several books on the traditions of horse-herders and herdsmen of different regions, including their folk songs and musical instruments.

In 1898, Ottó Herman was the first to describe and make an ethnographically accurate drawing of a Hungarian table zither which he called the 'zither of Szentes'. He documented a great variety of shepherd’s flutes describing their sizes and materials in so much detail that they could be reproduced today. Furthermore, in his writings he mentioned other kinds of instruments shepherds used, for instance the long flute, horn and other flutes, describing many of them.

The music of the herdsmen comes alive in Ottó Herman’s writings.

His descriptions of the musical instruments include not only their physical attributes but descriptions of the depth of sound they produced.

Not only did he write down the words of the shepherds’ songs, he linked the songs to various feelings they evoked, such as swaggering, tenderness, misery and pride. But for him the sound of nature was the real music.

“Up amongst the branches the golden oriole begins to sing. Its song is as wistful as the flute’s; a real song – just like Mozart’s fairy tale solo. (...) This community’s music is the combination of the calls of nuthatches, tits, flycatchers and blackbirds.”

(Ottó Herman, The beeches)

That is why he so regretted losing his hearing:

“You see your bird friend whose song had been your pleasure (...) but [you hear] no sound! You shudder, your heart misses a beat, your eyes stare and you are overcome with pain. (...) I know what loss is, I know what Beethoven felt. From now on, my fate is to be tossed about in pain, to become a hermit while every drop of my blood attracts me to life.”
The 40-year-old Muzsikás Ensemble is renowned and popular both at home in Hungary and abroad. They were the first to introduce Hungarian folk music to the world as a musical genre in the same league with any other music. They play at major concert halls of the world, such as the Royal Festival Hall in London or Carnegie Hall in New York and many, many others. Their records are played and distributed the world over, their concerts and albums have been praised by major newspapers, periodicals and music journals. Muzsikás has succeeded in bringing traditional Hungarian folk music to the stage with 20th century Hungarian classical music. They have performed all over the world and recorded with renowned classical soloists, chamber orchestras, choirs and symphonic orchestras. But they also play with the village musicians from places where tradition is still alive. At home in Hungary, Muzsikás is dedicated to playing at regular dance houses for children and providing special music programs in the schools. They have received important Hungarian awards such as the Kos-suth Prize, the Prima Primissima Prize and the international prize for world music, the Womex Prize.

At the opening ceremonies for the Memorial Year Muzsikás performed songs from the regions of Szatmár, Transdanubia and Transylvania. This is the traditional music from the pastoral life of the Pannonian Basin that Ottó Herman studied.

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| May | 10 | OTTO HERMAN MEMORIAL DAY  
Bird ringing demonstration, bird-watching, lectures, fishing demonstration |
|     |   | BALATON UPLANDS  
NATIONAL PARK DIRECTORATE |
|     |   | Birds and Trees Day in the Jokai Garden  
Family day |
|     |   | DUNA-IPOLY  
NATIONAL PARK DIRECTORATE |
|     |   | Bird ringing demonstration near the Hortobagy Great Fishponds  
on the Birds and Trees Day  
Ottó Herman memorial tour |
|     |   | HORTOBAGY  
NATIONAL PARK DIRECTORATE |
| August | 11-31 | The relationship between the work of OTTO HERMAN and the history of HUNGARIAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION  
Exhibition |
|     |   | MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT |
| September | 18 | Researchers’ Night  
Lecture |
|     |   | AGGTELEK  
NATIONAL PARK DIRECTORATE |
|     |   | In the wake of OTTO HERMAN  
Hiking series - the Bükk prehistoric caves  
(Kőlyuk cave) |
|     |   | BÜKK  
NATIONAL PARK DIRECTORATE |
|     |   | Spiders on Sas-hegy  
Walking tour |
|     |   | DUNA-IPOLY  
NATIONAL PARK DIRECTORATE |
|     |   | Saint Michael’s Day hike in Bugac  
Walking tour |
|     |   | KISKUNSG  
NATIONAL PARK DIRECTORATE |
| October | 4 | The OTTO HERMAN Year  
“Colourful Autumn leaves” hike |
|     |   | DUNA-DRÁVA  
NATIONAL PARK DIRECTORATE |
|     |   | Geotopes Days  
Geology hiking |
|     |   | BÜKK  
NATIONAL PARK DIRECTORATE |
|     |   | World Animal Day  
Peculiar spider species of the Sas-hegy  
in the wake of Ottó Herman |
|     |   | DUNA-IPOLY  
NATIONAL PARK DIRECTORATE |
|     |   | Geotope Days  
Geology hiking |
|     |   | BÜKK  
NATIONAL PARK DIRECTORATE |
| November | 12 | Drawing contest awards and opening ceremony of exhibition  
Fishing implements and methods from the past and today  
Lecture |
|     |   | AGGTELEK  
NATIONAL PARK DIRECTORATE |
|     |   | Fishing implements and methods from the past and today  
Lecture |
|     |   | HORTOBAGY  
NATIONAL PARK DIRECTORATE |
|     |   | XIXth Tata Wild Goose Concours  
Walking tour in Dinnye |
|     |   | DUNA-IPOLY  
NATIONAL PARK DIRECTORATE |