

Celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the Division of Botany, Department of Biology, Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb

The jubilee celebration marking the 150th anniversary of the Division of Botany at the Department of Biology, Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb, held in 2025 brought together representatives of numerous academic and related institutions. A commemorative ceremony took place in the Exhibition Pavilion of the Botanical Garden of the Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb, on Friday, 24 October 2025, honouring one and a half centuries of continuous teaching and scientific activity in botany at the University (Fig. 1A). As part of the University's long tradition of higher education, which dates back more than three centuries, the Division of Botany has played a central role in the development of botanical teaching and botanical literacy in Croatia.

The anniversary programme highlighted the historical significance of the appointment of Bohuslav pl. Jiruš, on 13 November 1875, as the first professor of botany at the then Faculty of Philosophy, which marked the beginning of organised academic work in botany and the establishment of the Department of Botany and Physiology, headed by Prof. Jiruš from 1877. From that moment onwards, botany acquired a formal position within the academic community of the University of Zagreb. Prof. Jiruš delivered his first lecture on 24 April 1876, on plant anatomy, histology and general morphology, and since then the tradition of teaching botanical subjects by members of the Division has remained unbroken to the present day. The Division has undergone several changes in name and organisational structure during its long history, but has functioned as part of the Department of Biology and the Faculty of Science since 1946. The celebration thus served both as a commemoration of this foundational moment and as an opportunity to reflect on the 150 years of development of the Division.

The guests were welcomed by the Dean of the Faculty of Science, Prof. Ivančica Ternjej, and the Head of the Department of Biology, Assoc. Prof. Zoran Marčić (Fig. 1B). The programme was moderated by Assoc. Prof. Sunčica Bosak, current Head of the Division. A historical overview was presented by Prof. Antun Alegro, Assoc. Prof. Sunčica Bosak, Prof. Gordana Rusak and Prof. Božena Mitić, highlighting key milestones in the Division's development. The celebration included a musical performance by the Faculty of Sci-

ence Choir "Cantus naturae", conducted by Kristijan Hiršel. The choir performed two carefully selected pieces ("Cetina" and "Neka cijeli ovaj svijet") that symbolically connected aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems and underscored the links between nature, landscape and botanical science. In doing so, the artistic component complemented the historical and scientific content of the event and further underscored the role of the Division of Botany in integrating diverse aspects of the natural sciences into a coherent view of the living world. As a gesture of appreciation to participants in the jubilee event, the Division prepared symbolic gifts, including lavender balms produced by the phytochemistry group and small pieces of jewellery created by artist Julijana Rodić Ozimec in the form of endemic Croatian plant species (*Campanula tommasiniana* and *Asplenium hybridum*), thereby underscoring the central role of plant diversity in the identity and work of the Division of Botany.

Several short presentations showcased the scientific, educational and institutional activities associated with the Division. A significant part of the Division's mission is embodied in the collections and databases that it maintains and develops, including Herbarium Croaticum, the Flora Croatica Database and the Croatian National Diatom Collection, important national and international resources for taxonomic, floristic and ecological research. Dr. Nina Vuković presented the Herbarium Croaticum collection, emphasising its role as a central national repository of plant biodiversity, while Dr. Vedran Šegota spoke about the Flora Croatica Database, an online platform that integrates data on Croatian flora and supports research and teaching.

The Faculty of Science is also the home institution of the journal *Acta Botanica Croatica*, a long-standing scientific periodical that this year celebrates one hundred years of uninterrupted publication and plays a key role in the dissemination of botanical research. Prof. Mirta Tkalec presented the role of *Acta Botanica Croatica* in the work of scientists and teachers at the Division of Botany, underlining its long tradition and importance. The journal originated in 1925 as the official journal of the Division, under the title *Acta Botanica Instituti Botanici Regalis Universitatis Zagrebensis*, founded by Prof. Vale Vouk, then Head of the Division.



Fig. 1. Members of Division of Botany together with the guests at the ceremonial event in front of Exhibition Pavillion in Botanical Garden, Zagreb (A), Chair of Department of Biology Zoran Marčić, Assoc. Prof. addressing the audience, at its left is the portrait of Antun Heinz, founder of Botanical garden and second chair of the Division of Botany, the visual identity and the logo of the event is shown at the screen (B) (photos: Renata Horvat)

As the final lecture, Dr. Sanja Kovačić presented the Botanical Garden of the Faculty of Science, a key university facility for teaching, research and public outreach in botany, and highlighted its long-standing institutional links with the Division and its staff. Established in 1889 by Prof. Antun Heinz, who at that time was both the founder of the Botanical Garden and Head of the Department of Botany and Physiology, the Garden was organizationally united with the Department and its successors until 2013, when it became a separate unit while remaining closely integrated with the activities of the Division of Botany.

Historically, the Division was first housed in premises belonging to the Gornjogradaska gimnazija high school and even then maintained a plant collection of more than 10,000 specimens. From these modest rooms it was moved to the main University building, today the Rectorate at Trg Republike Hrvatske 14, and later to the building in Marulićev trg 20. Today, the Division of Botany comprises 19 members in scientific-teaching grades, from assistant professors to full professors, as well as three professors emeriti. In total, including collaborators, the Division has around 40 members, some of whom are also partially appointed at the Department level. Over time, its organisational structure and name have changed, and certain subunits have branched off for various reasons, but since 2013, the Division has existed in its current form as an independent organisational unit within the Department of Biology. Today it is geographically distributed across three locations in Zagreb – in buildings within the Botanical Garden, at Marulićev trg 20 and at Rooseveltov trg 6 – all of which are currently at different stages of post-earthquake reconstruction. This spatial dispersion has historically posed organisational challenges, but it also reflects the breadth of teaching and research activities carried out by the Division.

Teaching in various branches of botany has been delivered continuously for 150 years. Field courses, often organised in collaboration with zoologists, have formed an inte-

gral part of the curriculum from its earliest days and are closely linked to experimental exercises and laboratory work. At present, staff of the Division participate in the delivery of several dozen courses and as many as 13 field classes. Through this sustained teaching activity, the Division has been crucial in educating future teachers of natural science subjects and in promoting botanical literacy more broadly. The contribution of the Division to higher education is also evident in the impressive array of textbooks and professional literature produced by its members, covering topics from plant anatomy and morphology to systematics, evolution, geobotany, plant physiology and marine phytoplankton.

Research at the Division encompasses all major fields of botany and a wide array of taxa, from algae and bryophytes to vascular plants, and addresses processes at cellular, organismal, community and ecosystem levels. These diverse activities are united by a shared focus on photosynthesis as a fundamental process defining plant life, a focus that is reflected in the visual identity of the Division, which incorporates the chlorophyll molecule as a central motif. In addition, a stylised chequered fritillary, conceived as a fictional representative species, has been adopted as a unifying symbol that underscores the common orientation towards plant life despite the diversity of research interests among staff members.

Members of the Division are actively involved in professional societies, in the organisation of scientific and expert meetings and serve on editorial boards of journals and society publications. The anniversary celebration highlighted this broader engagement, which contributes to the visibility of Croatian botany and strengthens collaboration with related institutions.

Sunčica Bosak, Assoc. Prof.
Head of Division of Botany
Department of Biology
Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb