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Prof. dr. hab. Bolesław Suszka – the man

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Bolesław Suszka arrived in Kórnik in 1951 with his newly wedded wife Janina straight from Kraków where they graduated from the Jagiellon University, Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry. Dr. Stefan Białobok (later professor), director of the Institute of Dendrology and Pomology, employed them both, assigning Bolesław to dendrology and his wife Janina to pomology. The institute was in the process of expansion planning a new building. During World War II Bolesław worked as a carpenter with a building team, so he acquired some knowledge about building. He was asked therefore to keep an eye on the building process to assure conformity with plans and solidity of performance. Being born in Silesia, Bolesław took this responsibility very seriously and molested the builders all along. Truly a very solid building was produced, which continues to serve us well to this day.

Prof. Białobok supported Bolesław in his interest in woody plant seeds. He agreed to the establishment of a seed laboratory within the complex of the new building under construction. To acquaint himself with forest seed problems Bolesław was sent for 1 month to the Forest Research Institute in Warsaw to do some work under prof. Stanisław Tyszkiewicz, the renowned specialist on seed problems, involved in the topic within the framework of the International Union of Forest Research Organisations since the thirties. Bolesław considers himself a disciple of Tyszkiewicz. Seeing the work done in Warsaw and having acquainted himself with the needs of forest seed science, he requested that within the new building a phytotron be constructed so as to be able to maintain seed in various conditions of controlled temperature and light. This was introduced into the plans for the new building.

The phytotron and the seed laboratory became his main concern for the next half century.

He devoted his professional life to the study of woody plant seeds, particularly their storage and pre-sowing treatment requirements. He had the good fortune to co-operate in this field with leading world specialists from various countries, “his masters” as he refers to them and about whom he will speak in a moment. His achievements include identification for many species of the most appropriate methods of seed handling so as to 1) shorten the germination period, 2) increase germinative capacity, 3) obtain germination in the best time for it from the nurseryman’s point of view, 4) shorten seedling emergence time in the nursery, 5) eliminate secondary dormancy, 6) prolong storage potential, 7) reduce demand for stratification and storage space. Numerous papers and books document these achievements. One of his books was translated into several languages.

He observed that seed lots of some species come to storage facilities with various degrees of after-ripening and therefore in various stages of readiness for germination. The first need therefore is to bring them to an equalised condition. In this context warm stratification proved useful. It was his first major achievement to extend application of a warm period of stratification, prior to the normally used cold stratification, as a useful treatment for several species. It completes the maturation of the seeds, brings them to a common physiological state with the resultant equalisation of the time needed for cold stratification, and can also be used to suspend the stratification process and bring the seeds back into a state of full dormancy. Experience with the effect of the warm phase led him to the realisation that seeds are adapted to the natural

conditions in which they have to germinate, immediately or next spring and that some even have a potential to extend germination capacity over several seasons through inductions of secondary dormancy, this latter potential being an adaptation to the fact that for some species abundant seed crops can be rare. All these natural adaptations when recognised can be effectively used when handling seeds.

He developed technologies for identifying the stratification needs for various seed lots, technologies for the after-ripening of seed without a stratification medium, technologies for reducing seed moisture content to a level permitting long storage with minimal mortality, technologies for simultaneous seedling emergence under nursery conditions and many others. His expertise covers a wide range of species with both orthodox and recalcitrant seed. On the basis of his technologies special facilities were developed in the Polish State Forests.

Bolesław Suszka became the world's internationally recognised leading specialist on woody plant seed, particularly on recalcitrant seed. He acted and

still acts as a consultant for the construction of various seed storage facilities, co-operated in many research projects, participated in the work of many international organisations dealing with seeds, such as IUFRO and ISTA, and is involved in teaching seed science in graduate and postgraduate courses.

Bolesław Suszka is a family man. He has 4 children and 11 grand children. A devout Christian, he works in the field of promoting natural family planning. He was drawn into the topic of family education by Fr. Karol Wojtyła, when attending with his future wife Janina a marriage preparation course run by the future Pope for Kraków students. Bolesław is an activists of the pro-life movement and a professional consultant in family problems. He authored several books with Fr. Karol Meissner OSB on the topic of preparing young people for family life.

He has several hobbies, too. He is an amateur coin collector, a student of fortifications, an avid reader of history books and has a very keen interest in current political affairs.