

## **How scientist Miroslav SANIGA has created the image of the „Bird Superstar“ - wallcreeper, and how, in its turn, the “Bird Superstar” has created the image of scientist Miroslav SANIGA**

At the beginning, there was a story about a little boy in a little village in a mountain valley with steep rocks and large trees. On Epiphany 1971, the village, called Liptovské Revúce was visited by a strange little bird. The apparition forced school children fully involved in watching a hockey match to switch their attention. The stranger was strange for everyone, including the teachers.

The creature appeared and disappeared. But not without serious, persisting consequences. One 7-year-old boy fell into a fatal love.

It would be wasting of paper for writing what a fatal love means, especially in the case where it is the first one, and the object is unknown and even ephemeral.

The suffering is almost unsupportable – evoking purgatory tortures. The efforts in searching information about the object can be immense. The smallest piece of information is worth of gold. No contact, no facts, only materialising the sacred object everywhere where possible (Textbooks, notebooks, walls of all sorts of rooms and similar surfaces ready to use – they all display their own experience...)

Eventually, the four years of the predestinated purgatory tortures came to the end. One of the spring issues of the journal „Život“ meaning the Life meant also some life for the fatal sufferer – thanks to a short communication and a picture of his beloved object. Information was short but sufficient, comprising the basic data about the bird and about its occurrence. The unknown object was unveiled: the wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*. It is simply not possible to forget such moments. The string of heavenly happiness is vibrating, and the love-connected activities can shift to more advanced levels.

The time progressed in its own rate, the boy was getting older, the piles of drawings were getting higher, and the drawings themselves improved noticeably – together with the author's abilities to communicate his experience.

So, we will switch from a boy to an adult person, well educated in zoology – and from feelings and impressions to description and information.

And from a story about a boy to the facts about **Miroslav SANIGA** working at the Institute of Forest Ecology SAS, a man well-known in Slovakia thanks to his very high efforts in communication of research on the nature to the public.

The fatal love of **Miroslav SANIGA**, wallcreeper, acts here as an immensely impressive and attractive superstar. **Miroslav SANIGA** has created the image of wallcreeper, the „Bird Superstar“, in its turn, has created the image of **Miroslav SANIGA**. Vast part of the public, both in Slovakia and abroad, has associated the author with the „Avian Top-model Number One“. In streets of Banská Bystrica, he is addressed as „the man engaged to wallcreeper“. Letters and e-mails to **Miroslav SANIGA** are written mostly based on reference to his „elixir of life“ materialised in this bird. The author experiences the uppermost satisfaction if people, ending their phone-call or e-mail append „greetings for the carmine-winged creature“

The idea of „translating the language of the nature to the people“ has possessed the author since his early childhood – just at the moment when the seven-year-old boy was evil-eyed by the tiny feathered phantom. A short summary of the story: At that time (year 1971), neither photos, nor pictures existed for this bird – so the object of his love remained a genuine mystery. The boy spoke to everybody about “being bewitched” by a mysterious little bird. The wallcreeper was the clue the nature used to open the author’s mind. Unfortunately, for long, the things were running between the nature and the author, exclusively. There was nobody to introduce to the boy the secrets of the nature: to show him a dwelling of a bear, an eagle or a wallcreeper. Not one living person. There were also only scarce books presenting the events occurring in hidden places of the nature around the year in a form easy-to-understand for a child: fairy tales and short stories.

And namely in this period originated the author’s dreams about writing, as a „great adult“, books for „small natural scientists“ – books whose absence he was suffering as a little boy. First in his mind were conceived the stories about the beloved wallcreeper and capercaillies. Later, there were written for driver piles of

stories reporting self-experience with visiting the secret nature's corners, especially in surroundings of his native village Liptovské Revúce. Having graduated from the university, and started his work at the Administration of the National Park Malá Fatra Mts in Gbeľany in year 1987, **Miroslav SANIGA** began with publishing short stories in journals handling natural issues (Poznaj a chráň, Poľovníctvo a rybárstvo, Rodina a škola), as well as in the daily press (Smer, Pravda na víkend). Since 1988 is dated is fruitful cooperation with **the Slovak Radio**, where in the **„Radio-weekend“** broadcasted regularly on Saturdays, he presented to the audience an animal each time. Since year 2007, the author has preparing for the Radio Regina the programme „Kalendárium prírody“ (**“Almanac of the nature”**), broadcasted on Saturdays. In the same year has been dated the beginning of his closer cooperation with the Radio Lumen broadcasting the Programme „Kalendár prírody“ (**“Almanac of the nature”**) on working days.

In year 1996, **Miroslav SANIGA** began with regular submitting reports for the Press Agency of SR – informing the wide public on the newest events in the nature and on results of his natural-science-oriented study.

The publishing of the books had been delayed for long. Eventually, the pile of stories and fairy tales in the author's drivers had reached a respectable size. He could not deny any more that the time had got ripe for publishing not only in journals but also in books. Another author's hobby, „immortalizing“ the things met in the nature in drawings, occupying his evenings spent in reclusion in a manor house in Gbeľany and (since 1993) in the Research Station of Institute of Forest Ecology SAS in Staré Hory, has multiplied the material for publication in form of popular-scientific books. The „first swallow“, „Poviedky tetušky Jedličky (**Stories of Auntie Fir**)“, was released into the world in year 1996. Since then, the author was saving his money for publishing at least one book yearly. Among the **37 hitherto published popular-scientific titles, the self-subsided ones represent 32**. There is another „emergency reserve“ of 10 still waiting in the author's computer. These were written in the „golden era“ when the author's mind was absolutely free of worries about this „secular world“ – thank to the „full service“ provided by his extraordinarily good

mother. Still another 10 books in the author's head are waiting for shift into the computer and then to the publishers.

**Miroslav SANIGA** considers selfish to treat the experience and knowledge achieved in the nature as his personal propriety. According to him, it would mean a natal sin against the Gracious Mother Nature. **Miroslav SANIGA** illustrates the written text with his own drawings and photos.

Very soon after initiating his career in science, **Miroslav SANIGA** got aware of how much it is important to communicate the scientific issues to the wide public – the one possible way how to obtain their agreement for boosting research activities. Science communication aimed at forming the public opinion is, according to the author, one of the primary and irreplaceable duties of each scientific worker. It is very low probable that future natural scientists „latent in children and young people“ would be recruited without well targeted and precisely planned “tuning” of their minds. The author feels responsible, and takes maximum efforts to communicate science to the young public.

If we want to „grasp“ a young boy or a girl for science, it would be really wrong to shift the „recruitment” to the secondary schools or even to the universities. The raising and education of a „well-armed“ scientist, for whom his job is also vocation and hobby, requires to awake interest as early as in primary school children. The author's experience shows that the most appropriate forms of work with young people are presentations and field excursions intended for and followed by experience learning – practising their own observations and experiments. This attitude has been backed up with **520 lectures presented in primary and secondary schools** and with **282 field excursions** oriented on observations of the life in the nature.

The readiness and flexibility over **25 years of science communication** have guaranteed the author with a very good credit from the mass media. He is ready to answer the questions and address the problems around the clock. This has labelled him with a nick „**An eco-friend and eco-advisor on the phone**“. **Miroslav**

**SANIGA** has accepted this role also in contact with the audience of his broadcasts and the readers of his books.

His handy was many times used for „on-line“ problem solving for people „stressed“ in various conflicts, *vis-a-vis* various animal species (martens, bears, bats, tits, earwigs, frogs...), they could not get through by themselves. He preserved the citizens from various „terrific“ experiences, he saved the public purse from expenses required for fire-brigade and police interventions. Last but not least, he has saved a large number of animal lives sentenced to death otherwise – if there had been no professional advice how to manage not-intended interactions of animals with the man unfamiliar either with life in the nature or ethological requirements of animals.

An essential means for survival of scientists is their feedback to the accomplished work. In the “pure” science it means citations of and references to their scientific outputs. In area of science communication, it is wide public responding with letters, e-mails, phone-calls or personal communication. **Miroslav SANIGA** can boast with very rich contacts with the audience of his radio broadcasts, TV-watchers and readers of his books. There is no day without answering a question addressed him through „EKOPORADŇA (**Eco-advise**)“. **Miroslav SANIGA** declares that namely the questions raised by the “common” people, especially children and young are giving him major incentives for his work in science and in science communication.

At the just beginning of his carrier in science, the author found out how important for science is advertising: equally the research outputs and the working place where these came to existence – in total absence of world’s comforts and pleasures. Presenting research results, expressing opinions on a variety of issues concerning life in the nature and science communication are, according to the author, the zero-cost demanding ways of advertising. The communication of research outputs in the just discussed forms is an efficient tool for creating positive image of the scientific work itself as well as the image of the scientific institute.