

## PREFACE

It is with immense pride that we commemorate the enrollment of the 65th inaugural cohort of undergraduate and graduate students of biology and ecology at the Faculty of Sciences, University of Novi Sad—a milestone tracing its origins from the Faculty of Philosophy to the Faculty of Sciences's establishment in 1969. The Department of Biology and Ecology proudly dedicates this special issue of *Biologia Serbica* as a testament of our enduring commitment to excellence in scientific scholarship.

Over the past six decades, our vibrant academic community has navigated a myriad of formidable challenges, including periods of profound socio-political and economic turbulence, yet has advanced with resolute dedication to the pursuit of scientific inquiry, education, and innovation. This multidisciplinary department, encompassing diverse fields such as ecology, genetics, microbiology, botany, zoology, physiology, molecular biology and environmental sciences, has fostered an integrated approach to biological research that bridges fundamental discoveries with applied solutions to pressing global challenges. Prospective students can choose from programmes in General Biology, Ecology and Nature Conservation, as well as Molecular and Functional Biology, on different academic study levels (<https://www.dbe.uns.ac.rs/en/studies/study-programmes/>).

In recent years, we have further expanded our academic offerings by establishing innovative new study programmes, including MSc in Reproductive Biology and Embryology and BSc in Bioinformatics, which equip students with cutting-edge expertise at the intersection of biology, medicine, and computational sciences.

Our distinguished faculty—comprising eminent professors and researchers—have garnered widespread acclaim through their leadership in securing prestigious national and international research projects. These endeavors, funded by leading institutions such as the European Research Council, Horizon Europe programmes, and national agencies like the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, have not only elevated our global standing but also yielded groundbreaking publications, patents, and collaborative networks spanning continents.

Equally remarkable is the legacy of our students, whose intellectual rigor and perseverance have borne extraordinary fruit. Hundreds of alumni have successfully defended their MSc and PhD theses in Serbia, across the Western Balkans region, and at prestigious universities worldwide. These scholars now occupy pivotal roles as professors, researchers, policymakers, and innovators, perpetuating the Department's influence on the international stage.

Even amidst the uncertainties of this turbulent year, our unwavering commitment to advancing biological research endures, serving as a beacon to inspire the next generation of scientists. We extend a cordial invitation to our esteemed readers—fellow researchers, students, and collaborators—to delve into the innovative contributions featured within these pages. They exemplify the Department's rich legacy of multidisciplinary excellence, resilience, and forward-looking vision.