

Onaney Muñiz 1937–2002

On June 7, 2002, Onaney Muñiz-Gutiérrez, passed away of a heart attack in Havana, Cuba. Muñiz was born in the city of Bayamo, the former province of Oriente, Cuba on August 17, 1937. He received his BSc degree from Havana University in 1968.

Onaney Muñiz was director of Havana's Botanical Garden from 1959 to 1967 and the first director of the Institute of Botany of the Cuban Academy of Sciences from 1967 to 1980. From 1981 to his retirement in 1999, he moved to the Institute of Tropical Geography in Havana, where he was senior researcher.

Muñiz was a fine, respected and devoted scientist who made an important contributions to phytogeography, taxonomy and ecology of Cuba and the greater Caribbean region as well. In particular, he established a high profile within the botanical community with the description of nearly 150 new species – including new palms – often with co-author A. Borhidi of Hungary. He will be best remembered by IPS members for *Coccothrinax munizii*, named in his honor by Borhidi.

Having an incredibly versatile personality, Muñiz was also committed to preserve and protect the remains of Cuba's many landscapes. He studied the endemism of the Cuban flora and proposed schemes of species' migration routes through the Caribbean. He worked diligently on a theoretical reconstruction of Cuba's original 16th century vegetation. He introduced the commercial-scale mushroom cultivation in caves.

His colleagues witnessed his incredible devotion to botanical research, his meticulous mapping methods, and his commitment to reach the most inaccessible places in search of clues to understand the extraordinary endemism of Cuban flora. Onaney Muñiz felt a singular urgency for passing his knowledge on to others and for developing a genuine appreciation of nature in his country.

In his final days, Onaney Muñiz was enthusiastically working on establishing Havana's Metropolitan Park, an effort done, he said, to save the last relics of a rainforest within the city limits. He was also digging in the alluvial plain of Almendares River to find evidence of the Quaternary environment. He was organizing an

expedition to collect in the southern slope of the Turquino Peak (the highest in Cuba), a place he thought might yield some new species.

Although his health was not good in his retirement years, he remained committed to an active research agenda and he maintained a high profile within the geographical and botanical communities in his homeland. He died a few hours after reading his latest paper on landscaping and conservation of the royal palm in Havana to a group of planners and developers of the Cuban capital.

Onaney Muñiz was a productive colleague, a warm and generous friend, a strong force in scientific research and, above all, an ethical scientist. He is survived by his wife, Elsa.

Armando H. Portela

