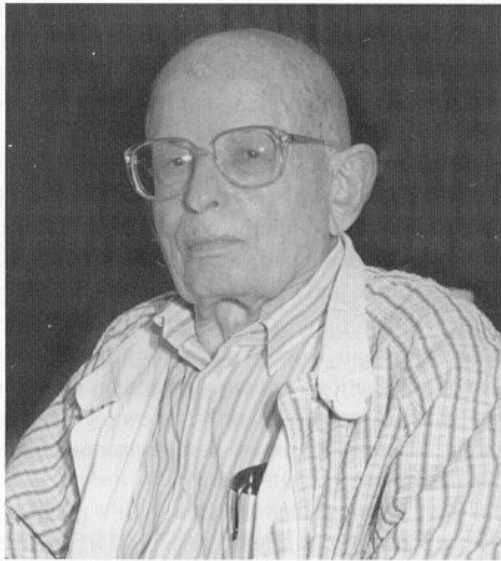


**HEINRICH MENDELSSOHN**  
1910–2002



Professor Heinrich Mendelsohn was born in Berlin on October 31, 1910 and died in his home in Ramat Chen on November 19, 2002. Since his childhood, he had taken a keen interest in animals, but, at his parents' request, he studied medicine in Berlin. He was a member of the Zionist youth movements "Kadima" and "Blau-Weiss", and with the rise of the Nazi movement to power in 1933 he immigrated to Palestine, then under British mandate. Palestine at that time did not yet have a Faculty of Medicine, enabling him to realize his ambition and transfer to the study of zoology at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. There he completed his M.Sc. (on the biology and variability of the desert snail *Sphincterochila boisseri*) and his Ph.D. (on population density of birds in Israel), both under the supervision of Prof. Shimon Bodenheimer. During his studies, Mendelsohn was invited by Yehoshua Margolin, the nature studies teacher who founded the Biological-Pedagogical Institute in Tel Aviv, to join the Institute's team as an instructor of nature studies teachers, and upon Margolin's death, Mendelsohn was appointed as Director of the Institute (1947–1953).

The Biological-Pedagogical Institute was one of the two core institutions from which Tel Aviv University was to develop. Mendelsohn took an active part in establishing the University and was the first Dean of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and the first Vice-President of the University. He founded the Zoology Department and for many years (1956–1966) he served as Head of the Department, which was to become the largest such department in Israel for the study of Israeli fauna. He encouraged research in a wide variety of fields, but particularly cultivated study of the whole organism: ecology,

behavior, and zoogeography. He perceived a good zoologist to be one who understood how nature worked, and that this understanding was only possible through a deep knowledge of the physical surroundings, of the local flora and fauna in their natural habitat, and to this end he impressed upon his students the necessity to maintain strong links with fieldwork. He founded the Zoological Museum, promoting understanding of the differences and variety of creatures inhabiting the land, and in which today can be found the largest representative collection of Israeli wildlife. The National Collections at the University currently comprise millions of specimens that constitute the basis for documentation and research into the biological diversity in Israel and provide vital data for nature conservation, agriculture, and the medical and veterinary services. For many years Mendelssohn was Director of the Zoological Gardens at Tel Aviv University, which he developed as a research and teaching tool, and where he also established breeding groups of endangered species with the purpose of reintroducing them to nature.

Prof. Mendelssohn's research dealt with a wide variety of species, from fish and amphibians, through reptiles, birds, and mammals. His study of the poisonous snakes of Israel is the most detailed and reliable on this group; his studies on the effect of agricultural pesticides on raptors in Israel were among the first in the world on this subject and led to a wave of publications and interest; and his studies on the behavior and ecology of wolves and gazelles constitute only a few of his many works. For his scientific endeavors and contribution to nature and environmental conservation he was awarded many prizes, including the Israel Prize.

There are those who have claimed that Mendelssohn's greatest contribution to the State of Israel was to nature conservation. He was a central figure in establishing the first nature reserves in Israel, the Society for the Protection of Nature, and the Nature Reserves Authority. During the period in which the Zionist leaders believed their mission to be to cover the land in concrete, he understood that it was no less important to preserve its landscapes, vegetation, and fauna. He was a Zionist of the open landscape, not of the building contractors and the politicians who helped them. Despite being a "Yekke", he had no fear of authority, and acted with firm determination to achieve his goals of nature conservation. His activities in the field of nature conservation were not restricted to Israel's borders alone, and he was a member of a number of professional committees in the IUCN (International Union of Nature Conservation).

Professor Mendelssohn was a fascinating teacher, and throughout the years taught thousands of students, first at the Kibbutz Seminary and then at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv University. His courses were extremely popular, and he continued to teach until two years before his death. Many dozens of students carried out their advanced degree studies under his supervision, and these students, their students, and their students' students are today among the field researchers of Israel, employees of the Parks and Nature Reserves Authority, and instructors and guides with the Society for the Protection of Nature.

He will be remembered for being the father of field zoology and nature conservation in Israel.

Yoram Yom-Tov  
Department of Zoology  
Tel Aviv University