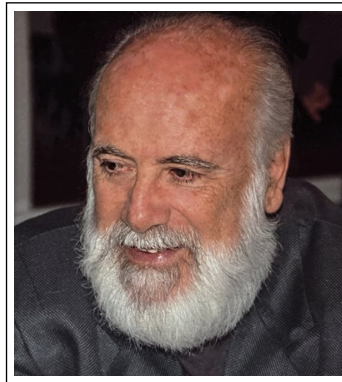


Fábio de Melo Sene (1942 – 2023)



Fábio de Melo Sene

On June 11, 2023, Fábio de Melo Sene, retired Full Professor of Genetics in the Faculty of Philosophy, Science, and Letters in Ribeirão Preto of the University of São Paulo (FFCLRP-USP) passed away at the age of 81 years, due to complications while treating an illness. He leaves behind his wife Alzira Celia Soares Sene, two daughters, Patrícia and Fabiana, three granddaughters, Mariama, Bartira and Julia, and the grandson Lucas.

Born on July 7, 1942 in Borborema, SP, he did his undergraduate studies in Natural History in 1966 at the Faculty of Philosophy Sciences and Letters of the University of São Paulo from 1963 to 1966 in São Paulo, where the Department of Biology, with the stay of Theodosius Dobzhansky in the 1950s and the focus on the population genetics of drosophilids, had become the powerhouse of Evolutionary Biology in Brazil. There, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Luiz Edmundo Magalhães, he also obtained his Master's degree in 1970 and defended his Doctoral Thesis in 1973 on adaptive value of the ebony mutant of *Drosophila melanogaster*.

Already in 1969, while working on his Master's project, Fábio de Melo Sene was appointed a teaching position in Genetics at the newly created Institute of Biosciences of the University of São Paulo (IB-USP). Then, in 1974, with a FAPESP postdoctoral fellowship, he parted for a stay in the paradise of *Drosophila* evolutionary biology in Hawaii. There, he studied the Hawaiian drosophilids in the laboratory of Hampton C. Carson, and this work subsequently was published in two papers, one in PNAS and one in Science.

After his return from Hawaii to IB-USP in 1976 he was appointed Head of the *Drosophila* Genetics Laboratory of the Institute of Biosciences, where he stayed until 1984. During this period, together with his colleague Francisca C. do Val and two of his doctoral students, Maria Augusta Q. R. Pereira, Carlos R. Vilela, he started an ambitious project to map the distribution of *Drosophila* species within the morphoclimatic domains of Brazil. The results presented a panorama of the geographical distribution and evolution of the South American species of the *Drosophila repleta* group. In 1981, Fábio de Melo Sene obtained the "Livre Docência", and in 1983 he became an Associate Professor of the IB-USP. Soon thereafter, in 1985 he took on a new challenge, as he moved to the Ribeirão Preto Campus of USP, where he established his new laboratory, using natural South American *Drosophila* species as a biological model system for understanding evolutionary processes. In Ribeirão Preto he was a professor in the Department of Biology of the Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters (FFCLRP-USP), where he taught Genetics and Evolutionary Biology to many generations of undergraduate students. He was also associated with two Graduate Programs, Genetics and Entomology. Already a few years after the move from São Paulo to Ribeirão Preto, Fábio de Melo Sene obtained a one-year CNPq fellowship in 1988 for a stay as Visiting Professor at the University of Arizona in the laboratory of Bill Reed, working on the cactus-associated drosophilids of the Sonoran Desert. Their classification required a detailed analysis of the male genitalia via multivariate morphometric techniques, and the knowledge of these techniques Fábio de Melo Sene shared with his students upon his

return to Brazil. Combined with molecular methods, this approach answered many of the questions raised in his earlier work.

In 1991, Fábio de Melo Sene retired as Full Professor of the University of São Paulo, but he maintained his academic and research activities. In fact, just a few weeks before his death, he had just submitted the course plan for his classical discipline on Evolutionary Genetics, to be taught this semester in the Graduate Program in Genetics of the Ribeirão Preto School of Medicine (FMRP-USP).

As professor, Fábio de Melo Sene put a strong emphasis on the formation of his students at all levels, from undergraduate students to postdoctoral researchers. In his laboratory, ideas, proposals circulated freely and collaborations were the norm, and all this was guided by the premise of allowing his students to fully develop their potential. In the classroom he passed on his enthusiasm for Evolutionary Biology, both with great profoundness and with good humor. The conception of his laboratory environment was profoundly influenced by the view that doing research means asking questions and finding answers to the major and broad topics of evolution, genetics, and the environment. In daily life, this meant a harmonious and productive integration of field work, with frequently very long travels to sample specimens from natural population of *Drosophila* species. Many of these field excursions were performed in collaboration with Paulo Emílio Vanzolini and Aziz Ab'Saber. From the collected specimens his laboratory then established isofemale lines for in-depth genetics analyses of these populations and species. He was a naturalist, and the drosophilids were his models to understand fundamental processes of Evolutionary Biology.

Fábio de Melo Sene published over 90 scientific papers in a wide variety of Brazilian and international journals, and most of these publications were in co-authorship with his former Master's and Doctoral students. Many of these, both from his years in São Paulo and then in Ribeirão Preto, are currently established professors in several regions of Brazil, leading their own groups. Most of them have maintained *Drosophila* species as model systems, with a focus on Genetics, Ecology or Systematics and Taxonomy of natural populations in tropical and subtropical morphoclimates of South America. He was a gifted writer, as is well doc-

umented by his books on evolutionary theory, such as “*Cada Caso, um Caso... Puro Acaso - Os processos de evolução biológica dos seres vivos*”, published in 2009 by the Brazilian Society of Genetics (SBG), and his textbook “*Genética e Evolução*”, published in 1991 for teaching Genetics in high schools. For the “*Origem das Espécies*”, one of the first Brazilian translations of Darwin's major work, published in 1982 by the Editora of UnB, he was the technical editor. Later on, in the movie “*Quem Foi Que Disse? Sobre a causa sagrada de Darwin*” directed by Luiz Andrade in 2015, in a memorable scene, he himself played the role of Charles Darwin.

Fábio de Melo Sene was a long-term member of the Brazilian Society of Genetics (SBG), where he played an especially important role in the societies' journal Genetics and Molecular Biology. He joined the journal as Associate Editor in 1984 and continued in this position until 1999. Then, in 2000 he accepted the nomination as Editor-in-Chief, which he held until 2005. As he replaced the former Editor-in-Chief, who had been in office since the first volume of the journal published in 1978, the first two years were not an easy time, but he could count with the permanency of Angela Maria Vianna Morgante as Assistant Editor. They kept the journal going, first by means of a special issue in 2001 that represented the results of the Brazilian sugarcane transcriptome consortium. Then, for the year 2002, they organized a new board of Associate Editors, and interestingly, many of these names are still represented in the current Editorial Board of the journal. This organizational stability soon became reflected in a continuous rise in the impact factor of Genetics and Molecular Biology.

In 2004, Fábio de Melo Sene was nominated as member of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences (ABC), and in 2006 of the São Paulo State Academy of Science (ACIESP). In 2005 he was awarded the President's medal for Scientific Merit (Comendador da Ordem Nacional do Mérito Científico) for his life-time achievements, and in 2017 he received the nomination “Pesquisador Emérito” from the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq).

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