

Review

By: Prof. Dr. Nikolay Dobrinov Natchev, Department of Biology, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Shumen University “Bishop Konstantin Preslavski”, elected as a member of the Scientific Jury and appointed by order 95/24.10.2025 of the Director of IBEI-BAS, in connection with the defense of a doctoral dissertation under the doctoral program “Ecology and Conservation of Ecosystems” in the professional field 4.3. Biological Sciences, at the Department “Ecosystem Studies, Ecological Risk and Conservation Biology” of IBEI-BAS.

Subject: Defense of a dissertation for the award of the ONS “Doctor” in the professional field 4.3. Biological Sciences, scientific specialty “Ecology and Conservation of Ecosystems”, at the Department “Ecosystem Studies, Ecological Risk and Conservation Biology” of IBEI-BAS.

The author of the dissertation under consideration is M.Sc. Kostadin Ivanov Andonov. After a detailed review of the attached documents, I found that all the necessary elements required by the Law on the Protection of Biological and Biological Resources of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Protection of Biological and Biological Resources of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions of the Institute of Biological and Biological Resources of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences are present. The submitted documents are in full volume and present the necessary foundation for the defense of the dissertation work.

Biographical data of the candidate

Mag. Kostadin Andonov is a student from 2010 to 2014 at the Faculty of Biology of Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski". In 2014 he defended his thesis and received a "Bachelor" degree in Biology. Immediately after receiving his bachelor's degree, he began his studies in a master's program at the Faculty of Biology of Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski" and in 2016 received a "Master" title in Zoology. In the meantime, he made a student transfer to Antwerp, defending a master's degree at this University as well.

Professional experience

Kostadin Andonov began his work as an expert in his early years of study at the Faculty of Biology of Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski". One of his first professional commitments was as a participant in a field research group in which I also participated. From 2012 to today, M.Sc. Andonov has participated in and led over 20 projects and has carried out expeditions on three continents.

Immediately after returning from his student exchange at the University of Antwerp, Kostadin Andonov started working in the Bulgarian branch of WWF, where he held the position of Director of the Innovation Department. The current PhD student worked in this position for seven years, after which he took the position of Scientific Analyst in the consortium "Ecorys south east Europe. Ltd". In parallel with his work in the private and non-governmental sector, M.Sc. Andonov holds the position of Expert Biologist (Biodiversity) at IBEI-BAS.

Lexical skills and communication competencies

Kostadin Andonov is fluent in English, which allowed him to develop his communication skills and organize the work of international work teams from an early age. His organizational skills and managerial qualities allow him to coordinate work on multiple projects and participate in numerous research expeditions in the country and abroad.

Personal impressions

I have known the candidate personally since 2011. I taught him "Zoology of Vertebrates" during his studies in the Bachelor's course in Biology at the Faculty of Biology of Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski". From a very early age, Kostadin Andonov demonstrated competence in the field of general zoology, vertebrate evolution, phylogeny and cladistics. Subsequently, he developed his competencies in the field of ethology, biomechanics, functional morphology, biochemistry, biogeography.

I have participated in many field studies with Kostadin Andonov. I had the opportunity to work with him on the implementation of the video production "A New Beginning for Land Turtles" in 2015. I have a joint article with Mag. Andonov, which is in the field of anatomy, but it is not included in the list of publications for the defense, and therefore I believe that I have no conflict

with my current position as a reviewer for the dissertation. At the end of this section, I will express my personal impressions of Mag. Andonov, since I believe that without any exaggeration he is among the most talented and promising scientists and administrators that I know and that are available in our country. Even when I was teaching him, I noticed this instinct for science that successful zoologists possess as an innate quality. This intellectual setting allowed him to quickly develop his potential, to orient himself precisely to the scientific environments in which he will develop successfully, and a year after graduation to realize a publication in an elite quartile journal. All the enormous work that he did in the past and continues to do now, was done without any particular tension. The volume of activities that mag. Andonov performs is incredibly large and the intensity of their implementation is unbearable for 99% of the people I know (including completely unthinkable for me). However, I have not felt even ordinary tension in Kostadin. These are qualities that are intertwined in the character of the doctoral student and help him in his extremely successful career in business and science.

Public activity as an expert and project activity

Kostadin Andonov began his project activity as a student. Since then, for a little more than a decade, he has participated in dozens of projects and expert initiatives. He has participated in projects financed and managed by the Ministry of Environment and Water, in projects under the Scientific Research Fund, as well as in projects of private consortia. In many of the projects, Mag. Andonov has participated as an expert, but in others he has also taken part as the author of the project proposals themselves and as a compiler of the work methodologies.

In public relations, Kostadin Andonov has participated in numerous campaigns to proclaim and carry out conservation and restoration environmental activities, as well as in explanatory and scientifically popular campaigns. Mag. Andonov is one of the most recognizable authors of popular science materials in society and has often been a lecturer in various public initiatives.

Scientific activity and publications

Kostadin Andonov began his scientific activity as part of the scientific working group of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nikolay Tsankov. Among his first tasks was to structure and digitize the huge amount of information collected over more than 50 years during the field research of Assoc. Prof. Dr.

Vladimir Beshkov. In parallel with this activity, Kostadin Andonov began work on establishing the morphological features of the reproductive systems of snakes. His first scientific publication was in 2014 in the book of abstracts from the conference on viperid biology held in Greece. His first full publication in an impact factor publication followed in 2017. After this period, the rhythm of the publications has been compatible with world standards, with the quality of the products being assessed by the realization of numerous articles from quartiles one and two. In fact, most of the publications have been realized in primary refereed publications, with all quartiles represented. Mag. Andonov and his colleagues have formed a scientific team that is very well balanced and very productive. In the majority of articles from the elite quartiles, Kostadin Andonov is the first author, which is an indicator that the concept and implementation of the scientific activities is mainly his. To date, Kostadin Andonov has 21 scientific publications that have been cited over 60 times - a truly impressive result. The Hirsch index of Mag. Andonov at the moment is 4.

Scientometric indicators of the competition

Four publications have been submitted under the defense procedure, which have been implemented in quartiles one, two and three. Kostadin Andonov is the first author of all articles. One of the publications has an impact factor of 4.4. Two of these publications have received a total of seven citations so far.

Compliance with the legislation of the Republic of Bulgaria

From the credit report of Kostadin Andonov, it is evident that the educational program in cluster one was completed with the necessary credits. The scientific program and the approbation have been completed with 64 credits, which is much more than those set out in the legislation. The attached publications under cluster three were assessed with 80 credits, which is almost three times the required requirements. The total number of credits collected under the procedure is 274, which is almost double the requirements. Based on the submitted references and documents by mag. Kostadin Andonov, it can be concluded that all the requirements for acquiring the "Doctor" title enshrined in the legislation of the Republic of Bulgaria have been met.

Quality of the Abstract

The abstract is of excellent technical execution, but does not fully fulfil its role in the sense of the procedures for defending a dissertation. The purpose of the abstract is not to repeat the dissertation work, but to present the scientific production in a non-technical language in order for the work and results to be accessible to non-specialists. The text should use a minimum of scientific terminology and adhere to a more direct style of expression. The volume of the abstract is very large, but in fact there are no strict standards and I accept the abstract in its current form with the remarks made at the beginning of the paragraph.

Conclusions from the study and Contributions to the competition

The contributions are structured in three groups, with a total number of nine. In my opinion, the contributions to science of the articles in the dissertation are very significant and are formulated very concisely in the reference for this procedure. Due to the lack of formal rules for forming the contributions, I accept this section in its current form.

Conclusion

As a member of the Scientific Jury determined by order 95/24.10.2025 of the Director of IBEI-BAS, after a detailed analysis of the documentation submitted under the procedure, I can state that M.Sc. Kostadin Ivanov Andonov fully meets the requirements for the Award of the ONS "Doctor" according to the ZRASRB and the Regulations for its implementation, as well as the Regulations for the terms and procedures for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions at IBEI-BAS. I give a positive assessment and vote "For" the award of M.Sc. Kostadin Ivanov Andonov to the title "Doctor" in in professional field 4.3. Biological Sciences.

12. 12.2025

Shumen

(Prof. Dr. Nikolay Natchev)