

# The life-work of Péter Beretzk Dr.

Category: cultural heritage – repository of values in Szeged

Motto: “The pioneer of taking photos of birds in Hungary.”

**Péter Beretzk was a doctor and a bird expert. Beside his official work, he spent his whole free time with observing, taking photos and collecting of the avifauna in Csongrád county. He wrote articles and studies about his observations. He gifted his huge photo and bird collection to the Móra Ferenc Museum. Owing to him, the bird reserve in Lake Fehér was established.**

## Did you know?

1. The first bird reserve in Hungary was established in Lake Fehér in 1939.
2. Lake Fehér is 13 km<sup>2</sup>.
3. A fish farm has been working in Lake Fehér since 1933.
4. The film of István Homoki-Nagy, the “*Vadvízország*”(The Hungarian Wild Water-world) was shot in Lake-Fehér in 1952.
5. Péter Beretzk also played a role in public life in Szeged, he was the member of the municipal council.
6. Péter Beretzk has more hundreds of scientific and educational articles.
7. He had an important role in the landscaping of Stefánia Park.
8. During World War II, “*Közművelődési Palota*” (Palace of Public Education) was a refuge.
9. Lake Fehér was mentioned for the first time in an official document in 1075.
10. Every year in the middle of November (in 2015 between 13-15<sup>th</sup> November), the migration of birds (*Fehértavi Darvadozás*) is celebrated in the Southern Hungarian Plain.
11. The Ornithological and Conservationist Study Group of TIT Biological Department of Csongrád county was established in 1963, owing to the initiative of Péter Beretzk.
12. TIT - which still operates - means Society for Popularization of Scientific Knowledge and its legal predecessor was established in 1841.
13. The memorial plaque of Péter Beretzk was made by András Lapis sculptor.
- 13+1 The original bronze memorial plaque was stolen, the replica was made from marble.

## His life and life-work

Péter Beretzk Dr. (1894-1973) doctor and bird expert is also named as “The father of Lake Fehér” in Szeged. Owing to his work, Lake Fehér became well-known all over Europe, which earned fame also for Szeged. A lot of scientific and educational articles by Beretzk were published about Lake Fehér. The protection of the Lake is linked with his name. His outstanding life-work is preserved by several streets, conservationist associations and memorial plaques.

Before Beretzk, the saline fields were barely studied by the Hungarian scientists. The field “Ösfehér-tó selyemvidék” near Szeged – which was almost completely untouched – was started to be studied in 1932 by Beretzk. The most valuable things - beside its specific flora and fauna - were the nesting birds in the saline fields. The Lake (“Vadvízország”) was an important place for the huge groups of migratory birds.

In the 1930s, the Lake was started to be transformed to fish-ponds. Péter Beretzk struggled a lot in order to protect Lake Fehér. On the base of a proposal handed in commonly with István Győrffy, about 160 hectares of the old saline fields („összikes”) on the North of the main channel of Algyő became protected on local level by the local authorities of Szeged in 1938. Next year, about 200 hectares fields became protected on national level by the agricultural minister. Thus, *the first Hungarian bird reserve* was realized.

Péter Beretzk has studied the saline avifauna of the Lake for four decades, followed the transformation of flora and fauna, which was the result of the formation of fish-ponds. The results of his research were presented in more than 400 scientific and educational articles written by him. With his observation which took whole decades and bird ringing data, he outlined a new picture of the passage of birds in Hungary.

He was one of the pioneers in taking photos of birds in Hungary.

In 1951, he gifted his artistic preparations to the State Museum of Szeged as a deposit in trust. In his collection, there were 806 preparations and 90% of them were from Lake Fehér. He made 3 conditions:

- “... the whole collection has to be placed in the State Museum of Szeged,...”
- “... the board of the museum has to provide the further development of the collection...”
- (The museum) “... has to make an up-to-date exhibition from the actual collection of the flora and fauna of Lake Fehér and from the further collections in 1952.”

The exhibition is still available in the Natural Science Collection of the Móra Ferenc Museum (previous registration is needed).

In 1952, the biggest permanent scientific exhibition of the region, “The life of Lake Fehér” was established by the initiative of Péter Beretzk and with the involvement of experts from the region and Budapest.

The film of István Homoki-Nagy, “Vadvízország”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFWpLVKrL6g>

The first Ornithological and Conservationist Study Group of TIT Biological Department of Csongrád county was established in 1963, owing to the initiative of Péter Beretzk. Thus, Szeged became the regional centre of the ornithological research.

For his efforts to save the Lake and its surroundings, he was named as “The father of Lake Fehér”.

## Links

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