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A farewell to Alexander Feijoo Martínez (07 June 1963–05 December 2023)

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FIGURE 1. Alexander Feijoo in one of his favorite activities: looking for earthworms. In the present case, holding an adult of *Rhinodrilus motucu* Righi, 1971, dug up from a pasture in Umbaúba, Sergipe, Brazil (01 April, 2013). Photo: George Brown.

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While thousands of people across the world celebrated World Soil Day, in the early hours of the night we lost a strong advocate for sustainable soil use, for traditional knowledge of soils and their fauna, and for soil biodiversity discovery, particularly in the neotropics. Alexander Feijoo Martínez (Figure 1) passed away on 05 December 2023. Born in June 1963, he was raised by his parents Justo Germán Feijoo and María Martínez near Palmira, in the Cauca River Valley of Colombia.

Having finished high-school in 1982, he began his university degree in Animal Science (*Zootecnia*) a few years later (1985) at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia (UNAL) at the Palmira campus, pursuing his interest in earthworms, strengthened by a visit in 1993 of Profs. Andras Zicsi† and Csaba Csuzdi, earthworm taxonomists from Hungary. From that visit, began a long-lasting collaboration, in which both Andras and Csaba contributed to many constructive interactions in earthworm taxonomy, as well as to Alex's first paper describing new earthworm species (Zicsi & Feijoo, 1994; one of his first publications).

A self-taught taxonomist, Alexander was also an avid reader and corresponded with many other taxonomists as well, including Samuel James, Gilberto Righi†, Carlos Fragoso, and Ana Moreno aiming to acquire the much-needed literature and additional experience in the intricacies required to practice earthworm taxonomy, where each species description is like a miniature anatomical monograph (Righi, 1999). In 1993 he defended his undergraduate thesis on the earthworms from a portion of the Cauca valley [*Inventario de las lombrices de tierra (Annelida*, *Oligochaeta) de una región del departamento del Valle*, *Colombia*], resulting in a list of 30 species belonging to seven families and 18 genera present in the Palmira region of the Valle Department (Feijoo, 1993). This publication already highlighted the large number of potentially new species to be found and described in Colombia. The process of new species discovery and description was according to Alex "a pleasure that I do not grow tired of". In fact, over the following three decades Alex described either alone or with colleagues from other countries a total of 59 species (Table 1), mainly from Colombia (39), but also from Brazil (12), Peru (4), and Venezuela (4).

TABLE 1. Earthworm species described by Alexander Feijoo either alone or together with other colleagues. Species marked with an asterisk (*) are described in this special issue.

Earthworm family and species	Authors	Country of type species
Glossoscolecidae		
Fimoscolex nivae	Feijoo & Brown 2018	Brazil
Glossodrilus betoye	Feijoo 2008	Colombia
Glossodrilus chaguala	Feijoo, Zuluaga & Molina 2018	Colombia
Glossodrilus griseus	Zicsi & Feijoo 1994	Colombia
Glossodrilus lacteus	Zicsi & Feijoo 1994	Colombia
*Glossoscolex (Glossoscolex) anaclaudiae**	Dudas, Feijoo & Brown 2025	Brazil
Glossoscolex (Glossoscolex) araucariaensis	Feijoo & Brown 2023	Brazil
Glossoscolex (Glossoscolex) cardosoi	Feijoo & Brown 2023	Brazil
*Glossoscolex (Glossoscolex) demeijeri**	Dudas, Feijoo & Brown 2025	Brazil
*Glossoscolex (Glossoscolex) demetrioi**	Dudas, Feijoo & Brown 2025	Brazil
Glossoscolex (Glossoscolex) embrapaensis	Feijoo & Brown 2018	Brazil
*Glossoscolex (Glossoscolex) itatiaiaensis**	Dudas, Feijoo & Brown 2025	Brazil
Glossoscolex (Glossoscolex) maschio	Feijoo & Brown 2018	Brazil
Glossoscolex (Glossoscolex) santarosaensis	Feijoo & Brown 2023	Brazil
Righiodrilus andake	Feijoo & Celis 2012	Colombia
Righiodrilus cusiani	Celis, Feijoo & Rangel-Chico 2018	Colombia
Righiodrilus inga	Feijoo & Celis 2012	Colombia
Righiodrilus muinane	Feijoo & Celis 2012	Colombia
Righiodrilus omagua	Feijoo & Lavelle 2023	Peru
Rhinodrilidae		
Andiodrilus achagua	Feijoo 2008	Colombia

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TABLE 1. (Continued)

Earthworm family and species	Authors	Country of type species
Andiodrilus cravijae	Celis, Feijoo & Rangel-Chico 2018	Colombia
Andiodrilus cuiba	Feijoo 2008	Colombia
Andiodrilus guahibo	Feijoo 2008	Colombia
Andiodrilus guayabero	Feijoo 2008	Colombia
Andiodrilus makaguaje	Feijoo 2008	Colombia
Andiodrilus masiguare	Feijoo 2008	Colombia
Andiodrilus nonuya	Feijoo & Celis 2012	Colombia
Andiodrilus piapoco	Feijoo 2008	Colombia
Andiorrhinus (Amazonidrilus) karinae	Feijoo, Brown & James 2017	Brazil
Andiorrhinus (Amazonidrilus) rodriguezi	Feijoo, Brown & James 2017	Brazil
Andiorrhinus (Meridrilus) timotocuica	Feijoo, Brown & James 2017	Venezuela
Andiorrhinus (Meridrilus) torondoy	Feijoo, Brown & James 2017	Venezuela
Andiorrhinus (Meridrilus) n.sp.1	Feijoo, Brown & James 2017	Venezuela
Andiorrhinus (Quibario) tatuy	Feijoo, Brown & James 2017	Venezuela
Andiorrhinus (Turedrilus) acaciascensis	Feijoo 2008	Colombia
Andiorrhinus (Turedrilus) duranti	Feijoo, Brown & James 2017	Venezuela
Andiorrhinus (Turedrilus) yukuna	Feijoo & Celis 2012	Colombia
Diachaeta (Amazo) sabalomurui	Feijoo, Peña & Zuluaga 2020	Colombia
Martiodrilus (Botaria) nukak	Feijoo 2008	Colombia
Martiodrilus (Cordilleroscolex) alarconi	Zicsi, Csuzdi & Feijoo 2002	Colombia
Martiodrilus (Cordilleroscolex) mirania	Feijoo & Celis 2012	Colombia
Martiodrilus (Cordilleroscolex) preciadoi	Zicsi, Csuzdi & Feijoo 2002	Colombia
Martiodrilus (Maipure) huitoto	Feijoo & Celis 2012	Colombia
Martiodrilus (Maipure) palmirus	Zicsi & Feijoo 1994	Colombia
Martiodrilus (Maipure) quimbayaensis	Feijoo, Zuluaga & Molina 2018	Colombia
Martiodrilus (Maipure) tapiai	Feijoo & Lavelle 2023	Peru
Martiodrilus (Maipure) uwa	Feijoo 2008	Colombia
Martiodrilus (Maipure) yurimaguensis	Feijoo & Lavelle 2023	Peru
Martiodrilus (Martiodrilus) alegrei	Feijoo & Lavelle 2023	Peru
Periscolex coreguaje	Feijoo & Celis 2012	Colombia
Periscolex muisca	Feijoo 2008	Colombia
Periscolex saliba	Feijoo 2008	Colombia
Periscolex sicuani	Feijoo 2008	Colombia
Pontoscolex (Pontoscolex) bora	Feijoo & Celis 2012	Colombia
Quimbaya calimae	Zicsi & Feijoo 2002	Colombia
Quimbaya gutierrezi	Zicsi & Feijoo 2002	Colombia
Rhinodrilus alecrisus	Feijoo, Peña & Zuluaga 2020	Colombia
Rhinodrilus buree	Feijoo, Peña & Zuluaga 2020	Colombia
Rhinodrilus muruiborane	Feijoo, Peña & Zuluaga 2020	Colombia
Rhinodrilus sinchi	Feijoo, Peña & Zuluaga 2020	Colombia

Upon completion of his undergraduate degree, he began to work in 1994 at the Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT) in Palmira with Edwin Bronson (Ron) Knapp†, to whom he said he owed much of his knowledge on soil management. This partnership expanded his network of contacts to many other professionals

passing through or collaborating with CIAT, including several colleagues and friends also working on earthworms like Patrick Lavelle, Elena Velásquez, Thibaud Decaëns, Juan José Jiménez, and Ana Moreno. At this moment, the "Macrofauna network" was expanding operations to the "Llanos" region of Colombia, but regulations prevented further involvement of Alex, who then proceeded to enroll in a PhD program at the UNAL Palmira campus, focusing on soil macrofauna communities in a Hillside region of the Cauca Valley. Nonetheless, the connection with CIAT and this expanding network allowed him to participate in several workshops abroad, and perform visits to both Spain and Mexico to work with his co-thesis directors Ana Moreno and Carlos Fragoso, respectively, on the earthworms collected during his field work.

In the ten land-use systems sampled of the Cabuyal river watershed (7,000 ha), he found 18 earthworm species overall, many (at least seven) of them new to science. In 2001 he defended his PhD on earthworm communities in the mountainous region of Caldoño [*Impacto del uso de la tierra en areas de laderas sobre comunidades de macrofauna del suelo (Caldoño*, *Cauca*, *Colombia)*], including a detailed description of earthworm population dynamics and structure, and their relationships to soil and land use properties (Feijoo, 2001). Upon his defense, he received formal recognition for being the first PhD in Agricultural and Livestock Sciences (*Ciencias Agropecuarias*) from a Colombian University. Some of the main results were published in Feijoo *et al.* (1999), his most cited first-author paper.

Shortly after, Alex was hired into a newly established department at the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, to where he moved with his family in 2001. Here, despite a major academic focus, Alex was able to secure several grants over the years which reduced the number of teaching hours, allowing him to dedicate more time to taxonomy and research. His perseverance and ability to work with many colleagues both nationally and internationally allowed him to progressively advance towards more senior positions in the university, as well as to positions in governmental bodies, such as the Consejo Nacional del Ambiente (National Environmental Council). Although trained as an animal scientist, much of the work he performed was highly relevant to soil science, and Alex participated actively in many projects related to soil fertility, conservation and management, and was often invited to speak at soil science-related conferences both in Colombia and abroad.

One of the several memorable projects he was involved in was the EU-funded AMAZ project (2006-2010) involving both Colombian and Brazilian Amazonia, and led by Patrick Lavelle. This project resulted in many seminal publications on soil biodiversity in Amazonia, and its relationship to ecosystem services (e.g., Marichal *et al.*, 2014; Lavelle *et al.*, 2016). New species of various invertebrates were collected, and over the following years he described all the new earthworm species from Colombia (Feijoo & Celis, 2011, 2012), although the Brazilian species descriptions were never finalized. In 2012-2013, Alexander and his family travelled to Brazil for one year, through a visiting professor's fellowship of the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), where he worked with George Brown for a year. During this period, Alex was able to focus almost solely on earthworm taxonomy, training several local students and leading two international earthworm taxonomy courses. He processed a large number of specimens of the Fritz Müller Oligochaete Collection (COFM) at Embrapa Forestry, and several lots of specimens from the Zoology Museum of the University of São Paulo (MZUSP), resulting in the description of 17 new species from Venezuela and Brazil (Feijoo *et al.*, 2017; Feijoo & Brown, 2018, 2023; Dudas *et al.*, 2025), and participation in several publications (Feijoo & Brown, 2012; Brown *et al.*, 2013; Cardoso *et al.*, 2014; Silva *et al.*, 2017; Demetrio *et al.*, 2023).

Unfortunately, his premature departure left behind many unfinished tasks, including a large number of partially described species, and a book on Colombian earthworms which was well advanced. In fact, Alex repeatedly surprised many of us with the sheer magnitude of the earthworm diversity of his country. For instance, he frequently mentioned his ongoing study of the earthworms of his University's Botanic Garden (12.7 ha), home to more than 20 earthworm species (updated to late 2023), most of them native, and several of them new, as of yet undescribed. Many of the small watersheds he sampled revealed high local species richness, and even small sampling efforts often led to large numbers of species, frequently including new, undescribed species, even in agriculturally managed sites in Colombia (e.g., Feijoo *et al.*, 2018) and Peru (e.g., Feijoo and Lavelle, 2018).

His intense sampling efforts, performed mostly in the Andes, but also in other locations throughout the country (Amazonia, Chocó, River Magdalena valley, Orinoquia, Guajira, Sierra Nevada, and San Andres and Providencia Islands in the Caribbean), greatly increased the knowledge of the Colombian earthworm fauna, resulting in the addition of more than 60 species to the list of those already known by the time he published his undergraduate thesis in 1993 (Feijoo, 2007; Feijoo, 2023). Consequently, his earthworm collection at the Universidad Tecnológica de

Pereira (Colección Nacional de Lombrices de Tierra UTP, abbreviated CNLT-UTP), recently incorporated into the National Network of Collections of Colombia (http://rnc.humboldt.org.co/admin/index.php/registros/detail/1756), contains >830 individuals collected since 1986, representing approximately 176 species (of which 39 are types), belonging to nine families (Acanthodrilidae, Almidae, Benhamiidae, Eudrilidae, Glossoscolecidae, Lumbricidae, Megascolecidae, Ocnerodrilidae, Rhinodrilidae) and 29 genera (Feijoo, 2023). Further information on the collection can be found in the Colombian Biodiversity Repository (https://ipt.biodiversidad.co/sib/resource?r=utp_coleccion-lombrices#anchor-description).

Besides taxonomic work, Alex's research also indulged in many other topics, such as the role of human knowledge, decisions and management in determining and valuing biodiversity and the delivery of ecosystem services. These became a major focus of his work in the latter years, and many of his seminal and most-cited publications deal with these topics (e.g., Feijoo *et al.*, 1994; Aldana *et al.*, 2006; Feijoo *et al.*, 2007; Feijoo *et al.*, 2011; Marichal *et al.*, 2014; Lavelle *et al.*, 2016; Decaëns *et al.*, 2018). Much of the data he gathered over his 30+ years of collecting earthworms and soil fauna have been essential in improving the understanding of land use management practices on soil biodiversity, with a major revision published recently in co-authorship with Lavelle and collaborators (Lavelle *et al.*, 2022). Over his career he published 60 papers in refereed journals and eight book chapters. A full list of his main publications is provided in Annex 1.

But Alex was not only a dedicated scientist and taxonomist; he also greatly enjoyed music and was an excellent dancer (also passions of his family!), a talent often shared with colleagues in the after-hours of workshops and conferences worldwide. Furthermore, he was an avid sportsman, having participated in national competitions of the hammer throw, and being active in cycling and swimming throughout most of his life. Consequently, he was a strong person, which greatly helped in the challenging field work in the Andes, and the exhausting digging needed for collecting earthworms.

Much of the work in Colombia was done in company of his many undergraduate and graduate-level students, as well as his wife Maria Constanza, who accompanied him in many field expeditions and also contributed to several publications (e.g., Aldana *et al.*, 2006; Feijoo *et al.*, 2003, 2005a,b, 2007, 2010, 2011; Carvajal *et al.*, 2005; Rojas-Múnera *et al.*, 2021; Zúñiga *et al.*, 2007, 2009, 2013). In fact, he trained and supervised many students (≈ 50) from Pereira and other Colombian universities, and was overall an excellent collaborator, always willing to share his ideas and thoughts regarding a particular topic, which was a big plus in the many workshops in which he participated over the years. He was also an easy person to work with, both in the field and laboratory, always very meticulous, well planned and paying close attention to details, which contributed to producing well described earthworm species and solid data for publications on taxonomy and other scientific topics.

Finally, Alex had a deep respect for indigenous and traditional cultures, their customs, and knowledge of the environment. His curiosity for local knowledge was always a wonderful entry-point for conversations in the field, with farmers, local land owners or managers, and even with field workers, with whom there were always good laughs and jokes, particularly concerning earthworms and soil fauna. In fact, most of the earthworms (>30 species) he described were named after indigenous groups, or using indigenous words (e.g., *Glossodrilus betoye*, *Andiodrilus achagua*, *Andiorrhinus timotocuica*, *Diachaeta sabalomurui*, *Martiodrilus nukak*, *Periscolex muisca*, *Rhinodrilus muruiborane*, *Righiodrilus andake*).

Alex was also a strong-minded person, always willing to enter often vibrant discussions on controversial topics, such as politics, religion, and socially-relevant issues. Nonetheless, he was always kind and respectful of differences of opinion, recognizing that the world is made up of vastly different persons, which make it so much more exciting to live in. Very socially conscious of the vast inequalities present in our world, Alex was constantly trying to make it a better place for those around him, and we can testify to his success at this task. Not only those close by, but others far away were often touched by his generosity, kindness, good humor, and dedication to any task he put himself up to. He had a very big heart, and his passion and love were evident to any who had the chance to interact with him, even if briefly! Following his example will surely make this world a better place, as he would have wanted.

Alexander Feijoo Martínez is survived by his wife, Maria Constanza Zúñiga Ibáñez, and two grown daughters, Maria Alejandra Feijoo Zúñiga and Isabella Feijoo Zúñiga. To them and to all colleagues who deeply mourn his departure, we extend warm condolences, grateful to have shared precious moments with such a wonderful person.

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Annex 1. List of publications by Alexander Feijoo Martínez

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