The arrangements devoted to the 80th anniversary of the birth of Vladimir Evgenievich Sokolov demonstrated the undiminished interest in his scientific and organizational activity, his success in solving problems identified by him, and the astuteness of his scientific vision. The opening of a memorial desk devoted to this outstanding scientist provided recognition of Sokolov’s services to domestic biological science and education.

The more time passes since the activity of Academician Sokolov, the larger his personality appears in the general picture of the difficult years of development of domestic biology, and the more significant the achievements connected with his name seem. The commission for preservation of Sokolov’s scientific heritage has published a series of works that remained in manuscript form after his death, a two-volume edition of selected works (Sokolov 2002, 2003); “Sokolov’s Readings” are held each year, and the Sokolov Science Support Foundation has been created. Memoirs about Sokolov (Academician Vladimir Evgenievich Sokolov … 2001) have been published. These memoirs reflect Sokolov’s role in creating the Institute of Evolutional Morphology and Animal Ecology of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union in 1967 (since 1994, the Severtsov Institute of Problems of Ecology and Evolution), the first director of which he was. A number of memoirs are devoted to Sokolov’s versatile activity at the biological faculty of Moscow State University, particularly at the department of vertebrate zoology, which Sokolov headed for more than 15 years.

In 1985 Sokolov was elected an academician-secretary of the General Biology Department (GBD) and a member of the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union (AS USSR) where he worked until 1998. He was the head of domestic general biologists for more than 12 years during conditions of the greatest social disruptions in our country. The volume and versatility of research carried out in that period by the Department and its subdivisions under the direction of Academician Sokolov are so significant but little known that we think it necessary to devote this paper solely to this part of his life.

The work of the Department in the late 1980s and early 1990s proceeded under conditions when the survival of many fields of domestic biology, institutes, laboratories, biological stations, scientific communities, journals, etc., was in question in a literal sense. All these problems were loaded on the shoulders of the academician-secretary in some way or other.

When Sokolov was elected to this post in 1985, the General Biology Department included 7 academicians and 25 corresponding members. During the period when Sokolov worked as the head of the Department, the staff that directed the research in the field of general biology in our country was considerably enlarged: in 1997 the Department already contained 21 academicians and 32 corresponding members. The increase in representation of zoologists, botanists, geneticists, paleontologists, and ecologists in the composition of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the conservation and strengthening of these fields of scientific research proceeded with Sokolov’s great and often decisive participation. His role in forming theriology as an independent scientific discipline in our country, organizing the community of theriologists (1973), and holding the First International Theriological Congress (1974) is well known. At the two next congresses, Sokolov was elected the president of these international forums. In 1990 he and a group of his colleagues were awarded the State Prize for works in the field of theriology. How-
ever, Sokolov's significance in the development of other fields of general biology has not been known and sufficiently appraised until recently.

In the last period of the existence of the USSR, the Academy of Sciences contained approximately one hundred institutes connected with the General Biology Department, which were located in all union republics. The Council for Coordination of the Department with a yearly circuit session was created on Sokolov's initiative (Ashkhabad, 1987; Riga, 1998; Kishinev, 1989; Kiev, 1990; Minsk, 1991). After the USSR disintegrated, the scientific ties with the institutes of the former union republics were broken, but all main institutes of the Department of the central part of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS), its regional departments, and scientific centers were conserved.

In addition, in 1991 the General Biological Department, Russian Academy of Sciences (GBD RAS) included the Institute of Dendrology formed on the basis of the homonymous laboratory, the Institute of Parasitology after the analogous transformation. The Center on Problems of Wood Productivity attached to the GBD RAS was created in the same year. The status of an institute was obtained by the Near-Caspian Institute of Biological Resources attached to the Dagestan Scientific Center (1990) and the Botanical Garden-Institute of the Ufa Scientific Center of the RAS. The Mountain Botanical Garden of the Dagestan Scientific Center of the RAS was distinguished with the rights of an institute. The Institute of Ecology of Mountain Territories attached to the Kabardino-Balkarian Scientific Center of the RAS was organized in 1994. The Institute of Forests (Yekaterinburg) and Institute of Ecology and Genetics of Microorganisms of the Perm Scientific Center were created in the Ural Division of the Academy of Sciences in 1988. The Sakhalin Botanical Garden (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk) under the Sakhalin Scientific Center of the Far East Division (FEB) RAS and Amur Botanical Garden (Blagoveshchensk) under the Amur Scientific Center of the FEB RAS were created in 1991 and 1994, respectively. All this shows what creative work was carried out in the GBD under Sokolov's direction in order to struggle against the tendencies of destruction and disintegration that overtook a significant part of society.

Scientific councils and scientific communities always played an important role in coordinating scientific research conducted by the institutes of the Department. All 11 earlier formed councils were successfully conserved in the period of the most serious social disruptions. In addition, the new Scientific Council on Parasitology Problems arose in 1994. The Council for Investigation and Protection of the Cultural and Natural Heritage that was structurally subordinated to the Presidium of the RAS was created in 1992 with the active participation of Academician Sokolov, the General Biology Department, and Academician E.N. Chelyshev (Department of Literature and Language).

In the 1990s, the Department carried out the State Scientific-Technical Program (SSTP) "Optimization, Use, and Widened Reproduction of Biological Resources"; the institutes of the Department also took part in the SSTP "Human Genome," "Newest Methods of Bioengineering," "High-Efficiency Processes of Foodstuff Production," and "Priority Fields of Genetics." The GBD took an active part in the scientific-technical programs "The World Ocean" and "The Arctic," ISTC "Biogen," the program of the CMEA, general academic programs of other departments, in the International Ecological Program "Man and Biosphere," and the ecological program of the AS USSR.

In 1992 the GBD started to develop a program of basic research "Problems of General Biology and Ecology: Rational Use of Biological Resources" with the active participation of the academician-secretary and scientific councils. The program supported with budget financing was meant to run from 1993 to 2005 and fulfill a number of successive stages. In 1992 the institutes of the Department also took part in developing a number of projects of the SSTP: "Ecological Safety of Russia," the ecological block of the SSTP "Oil and Gas of Russia," and "Development of the Economy and Culture of Small Nations of the North."

In 1993 the program of basic research "Conservation of Biological Diversity" approved as a State Scientific-Technical Program was developed by the GBD on Sokolov's initiative (the IPEE RAS was the lead organization). In the same year, the GDB provided its suggestions for the program "Science for Moscow" and later took an active part in fulfilling a number of its sections.

It is to be noted that budget allocations to science decreased in Russia in the years 1992–1996 by a factor of 7 (The Russian Academy of Sciences... 2002). The Academy, its departments, and institutes actually faced the problem of survival. The main efforts of scientist were aimed at solving the tasks of financial stabilization, searching for new sources of financing, regulating the legal status of the Academy, problems of ownership, and conservation of infrastructure. Much was done to retain and develop international cooperation. The leadership of the Academy successfully arranged constructive cooperation with the presidential and governmental structures and legislative power, taking an active part in developing legislation and strengthening the understanding of the permanent significance of basic science, including general biology, for scientific and technical progress and the development of society. It is thanks to the efforts of our leading academicians, among which Sokolov occupied a merited place, that the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR) was formed in 1992 and the state scientific grants for outstanding and young researchers were established in 1993. The Fed-