

Tallying the supercentenarians

One month or so before he died, Alexander Imich, the world's oldest man, asked a friend, "How long can this go on?"

The then 111 year old—who was born in Poland the year the Wright Brothers first took flight, and survived a stint in a Soviet gulag before immigrating to the United States in 1951—was informed in April that he just became the world's oldest known living man. In an interview in his New York City apartment, Imich [told](#) The New York Times, "I never thought I'd be that old," though wryly added that it's "not like it's the Nobel Prize."

Imich only held the title for about a month-and-a-half, however. He died in June, bequeathing the position to Sakari Momoi, a 111-year-old in Japan who was born just a day after Imich, on February 5, 1903. After Imich's passing, it likely did not take long for the news to reach Momoi.

"Oh yes, people know if they're next in line," says L. Stephen Coles, a lecturer in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at the University of California, Los Angeles, and co-founder of the Gerontology Research Group. Everybody wants to go down in history, he says.

Since 1990, the Gerontology Research Group has assumed the role of record keepers for the world's supercentenarians, or persons older than 110. Previously, research groups, individual countries and private hobbyists tracked supercentenarians for studies or for census purposes, or simply out of personal interest. But that information was not compiled into a central, standardized database, and it was largely closed to public viewing. "I thought, this ought to be available online, so everyone can know about it," Coles says.

To fill this need, around 15 years ago Coles and his colleagues began publishing their database online. Most attention falls on one list in particular, which they call "Table E." Neatly filed in chronological order, Table E contains all of the world's confirmed, still-living supercentenarians.

Read the full, original story: [Keeping track of the oldest people in the world](#)