

George C. Eickwort

June 8, 1940 — July 11, 1994

George Eickwort, Professor and Chairman of Entomology, died July 11, 1994 as the result of an automobile accident on the Caribbean island of Jamaica. George will be remembered by many people for diverse reasons. To his children, Alex (Mary), Robert and Jeffrey, George was a devoted father who participated fully in their lives; he especially enjoyed his free time visiting them at their colleges. To his brother, George will be remembered as a person of exceptional talent who displayed enthusiasm and determination for the lifelong interests he pursued. To his students, both the undergraduates who knew him as a teacher and the graduate students who worked closely with him, he represented a kind mentor and an insightful advisor who achieved the highest pedagogical skills. And to his many friends and colleagues at Cornell and throughout the World, he was a forthright, scrupulous, dedicated, and imaginative person with a multitude of talents.

George grew up in Brooklyn and studied insects as long as his younger brother Jerry can remember. He took this interest to Michigan State University, where he obtained a B.S. degree with high honors in 1962 and an M.S. degree in 1963. He went on to the University of Kansas, where he studied with CD. Michener, and obtained a Ph.D. degree in 1967. Thereupon he joined the Department of Entomology at Cornell as an Assistant Professor. During his career at Cornell, George regularly taught the Introductory Insect Biology, Insect Morphology, and Insect Behavior Seminar courses. Upon student request, he also offered Acarology and advanced seminars and courses on bee biology and systematics. His reputation as a skillful teacher ranged widely; it was not unusual for graduate students at other universities to visit Cornell in order to take one or more of his classes. National recognition of his teaching skills came through the 1986 Distinguished Achievement Award in Teaching from the Entomological Society of America.

George was equally active in graduate student advising: he guided twenty-four Ph.D. and six M.S. recipients during his 27 years on the faculty. His influence in teaching extended beyond the classroom through his contributions to textbooks, reviews, monographs, and as series editor for the Cornell University Press Arthropod Biology Series.

George's long-term research interest focused on the biology of the sweat bee family Halictidae—so-called because some species are attracted to human perspiration—and the evolution of sociality in these diversely social bees. The Halictidae embraces a wide spectrum of species with habits ranging from the solitary—in which a mother provides for her offspring by herself—to rather highly social, with several to many adults of the same or consecutive

generations cooperating to raise a brood. This range provides the opportunity to throw light on the evolution of social behavior, not just in these little bees, but as it turns out, in animals in general, humans included. George was fascinated, as is his whole generation of sociobiological investigators, by such questions as: What is the role of genetic relatedness in the evolution of the social state? What behavioral traits predispose the bees to sociality? What is the relationship of particular social structures to the environment? These interests led to extensive field work throughout the Americas and interaction with researchers in the fields of behavior, systematics, chemical ecology, and genetics. Because of his broadly based curiosity and his many talents, George became a pivotal person who brought together other colleagues and students in those disciplines and guided the way toward novel syntheses of ideas. His acumen in research received recognition through extensive invited service to the National Science Foundation, participation on numerous external reviews at other institutions, and the presidencies of the International Society of Hymenopterists and the Acarological Society of America.

George's unique service to Cornell University hinged on his ability to blend the interests and activities of sometimes disparate groups of individuals. At the time of his death, he had served only one year of his term as Chairman of Entomology. But, during that single year, he had forged close ties among diverse groups of insect biologists working on campus and at the Geneva Experiment Station; he placed high priority on fostering the research and training activities of the many people at Cornell whose work focuses on insects. Aside from teaching and guiding students in Entomology, he served as a joint appointee in the Section of Neurobiology and Behavior and participated very actively in that group.

George's success as a teacher and researcher was based on his incredible enthusiasm. Whether the subject was tennis, ornithology, or bee biology, he would convey his enthusiasm without artifice, thereby initiating people into the subject. George's teaching activities never ceased. He taught not only at Cornell, but also on sabbatic leaves at the University of California at Davis and the University of Arizona; during summers he taught at the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory. He actively participated in the Programa Cooperativo Sobre le Apifauna Mexicana, a program that combined teaching Mexican students about bees with a comprehensive survey of the biodiversity of the Middle American wild bee fauna.

George took students on numerous field trips and showed them firsthand the excitement of observing living organisms in their own environment. He also played the role of a classic entomologist, with net and jars in his luggage wherever and whenever he travelled to a location suitable for collecting sweat bees; given these bees' catholic habitat preferences, that meant everywhere.

Many former students trace their achievements as entomologists, insect behaviorists, or acarologists to George's guidance and example. He added to all of our lives through his gentle nature, thoughtfulness, accessibility, expertise, and enthusiasm. But in all ways he did much better than simply add to people's lives. He expanded their thinking and brought together people and ideas in a synergistic manner. As a result, his influence will extend well into the future. So strongly do his students identify with George's principles that they consider themselves "Eickwortians," a legacy that will be carried forward by many well-trained, highly talented scientists.

His explosive laugh which often rang down the hall or across crowded rooms, rose above the rest. It is hard to accept that we will not hear it again. However, George continues to live in the hearts and minds of his friends and colleagues.

William L. Brown, Jr., John G. Franclemont, Maurice J. Tauber, James K. Liebherr