

John George Matthyse

July 30, 1918 — November 8, 1996

Dr. John George Matthyse, 78, Cornell University Professor Emeritus, Department of Entomology, well known for his research in controlling insect and mite pests of livestock and of woody ornamentals and shade trees, died in Kirkland, Washington on November 8, 1996.

George grew up in New York City. Early in his life he showed a love for nature and science. He collected and studied plants and insects in the city and his family still has his journal recording his home chemistry experiments.

He entered the City College of New York, then transferred to Iowa State University where he earned a Bachelor's degree in 1940. He then came to Cornell as a research assistant in the livestock insect project. His doctoral thesis was based on the biology and control of the four species of cattle lice infesting cattle in New York State. His research also included other livestock insect pests such as sheep ticks, cattle grubs and house and stable flies. He received his doctorate in 1943 and was appointed research instructor by Cornell. In 1945, he married Elizabeth Grau, his beloved "Libby", and accepted a position with Geigy Chemical Company where he set up and supervised their lab in Bayonne, New Jersey, then later moved to Baker Chemical Company in Phillipsburg, New Jersey.

In 1947, a new project was established by Cornell's Department of Entomology to investigate and modernize the control of insect pests on woody ornamentals and shade trees. George returned to Cornell as an Assistant Professor in charge of this project and developed good control measures for many pests including very substantial contributions to the control of the insect vectors of Dutch Elm Disease. Several of his graduate students received their advanced degrees during this time. He also was one of the founders of the New York State Arborists' Association bringing together and further educating practicing arborists in identification, life history and control of woody ornamental and shade tree pests.

The untimely death of George's revered major professor, Dr. Herbert H. Schwardt, left the leadership of the livestock insect project vacant and George moved back to the work in which he was the most interested, now called veterinary entomology. He remained in this position, being appointed to Associate Professor then full Professor, until his retirement in 1974. He directed many graduate students who are now located in prestigious universities and other institutions nationally and abroad.

George had a close personal relationship with his graduate students. They were frequently invited to his home where he was a most informal, at times unconventional, host. One of his many graduate students wrote the following statement:

“George Matthyse was an intellectual of the highest order in the age-old tradition of academics. He involved himself in many interests of science and the humanities. Yet, he always had time to patiently guide, instruct, and counsel in order to improve the abilities of those with whom he interacted. He made friends for life, and as a major professor he was instrumental in the training of some of the best qualified scientists who have taken their skills throughout the United States and abroad. He always stayed in contact with his former associates. He was unfailing in his concerned support of others, and I consider myself most fortunate to have been among his friends. I shall forever remember him for his warm mannerisms, exuberant laugh, boundless energy, keen wit, and critical perception.”

Another former graduate student wrote that “All of us loved or hated him at one time or another in varying degrees.” George could be a critical taskmaster.

Throughout his Cornell career, George served on numerous foreign assignments. In 1952, he took a leave of absence to go to Africa to the nation then called Northern Rhodesia, focusing on the control of ticks and tick-borne diseases of livestock. He traveled to many remote villages to set up and demonstrate methods and insecticides used to alleviate the tick and disease problem. He used materials at hand, for example digging a large hole and lining it with a waterproof tarpaulin to substitute for the usual sprayer tank which would have been difficult to transport in the small aircraft often needed to reach the more remote native villages. He and his associates built their sprayers with locally available pumps and small engines, or units which could be powered with Jeep power takeoffs.

On one trip to Africa, George became infected with schistosomiasis—“snail fever”—an often-fatal disease that troubled him for several years. Nevertheless, George and Libby fell in love with Africa and with their family returned several times, working not only on cattle ticks but other pests such as the tsetse fly which transmits “sleeping sickness” making large areas of Africa unfit for human usage.

George was appointed to the University of the Philippines, Los Banos, to advise their Entomology Department on research and teaching methods, and worked with the United Fruit Company in Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama to deal with insect problems on bananas. He was also a member of the USDA-AID (Agency for International Development) team and visited Africa on various projects during the sixties and early seventies.

Among his more than 80 published scientific journal articles, George wrote a book with Murray H. Colbo, *The Ixodid Ticks of Uganda*, published in 1987 by the Entomological Society of America. The book is of great use to tick specialists (acarologists).

John George Matthyse was predeceased by his wife, Elizabeth; and their daughter, Kathryn (Katie).

He is survived by his son, Michael, and daughter-in-law, Margaret and their two children; and his son, John, daughter-in-law, Paula and their four children.

Dr. Matthyse made tremendous contributions to the study of life history and control of insect and mite pests of domestic animals and those of ornamentals and shade trees.

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