

# Roger A. Morse

*July 5, 1927 — May 12, 2000*

Roger A. Morse was a major figure in the field of Apiculture/Entomology for more than 40 years. During this time, he contributed abundantly to the scientific and popular literature on honeybees and touched many, many lives with his knowledge, generosity, humor, and enthusiasm for bees and beekeeping.

Roger Alfred Morse was born in Saugerties, New York. There his father, a superintendent of schools, kept bees as a hobby and instilled the interest in his son. Roger began keeping his own hives when he was about 10. He joined the U.S. Army in December 1944, before formally graduating from Saugerties High School in January 1945, and served in Europe until 1947. Upon returning to the United States, he enrolled at Cornell, where he earned all three of his post-secondary degrees: a Bachelor's in 1950, a Master's in 1953, and a Doctorate in 1955. In postgraduate work, he was State Apiculturist for Florida for two years. In 1957, he became an Assistant Professor of Horticulture at the University of Massachusetts, working there for six months before being appointed to the Cornell faculty as Assistant Professor. At Cornell, he rose through the ranks to become full Professor and to serve as the Entomology Department's chair from 1986-89. Over the years, he was also a Visiting Professor at the University of Helsinki, Finland; the University of São Paulo, Brazil; and the University of the Philippines, at Los Baños.

Over his life, Roger A. Morse turned his childhood interest in beekeeping into an encyclopedic knowledge that made him one of the best-known scientists of honeybees in the world. He was a prolific author with a special ability to straddle the worlds of scientific bee biology and practical beekeeping. Much of his renown came from his books written for amateur beekeepers which are classics in the beekeeping literature, such as *The Complete Guide to Beekeeping* (E.P. Dutton) and *A Year in the Beeyard* (Charles Scribner's Sons), and from his monthly column "Research Review", which appeared for over 40 years in the world's most widely distributed beekeeping journal, *Bee Culture*. He also traveled the world, often for the United States Department of Agriculture, learning about the diverse ways of keeping bees and sharing his knowledge to help local beekeepers, from Africa to South America, improve their craft.

When Roger A. Morse was not thinking about how to improve the practice of beekeeping, he was probing the inner workings of honeybee colonies, often in collaboration with one of his 27 graduate students and 6 postdoctoral students. Under his authorship or co-authorship, approximately 300 research and extension papers and 12 books were published. He is best known for his contributions to our knowledge of the pheromones of queen honey bees

and for his studies of the incursion of the Africanized honey bee, known popularly if fancifully as the “killer bee”, which escaped from a laboratory in Brazil in the 1950s. This bee’s reputation for aggressiveness made for many scary headlines as they made their way north, eventually arriving in the United States in the early 1990s. He was more optimistic than many in the beekeeping profession, suggesting that after the Africanized bees began mating with our familiar (and gentler) bees they might end up strengthening the current population of honey bees. Of greater concern to Roger A. Morse were two species of mites that parasitize adult honeybees. Introduced to the United States from Asia in the 1980s, these mites have virtually eliminated the wild colonies of honeybees and have forced beekeepers to monitor and medicate their colonies vigilantly.

Besides keeping and studying bees, Roger A. Morse taught the Introductory Beekeeping course and laboratory course on Practical Beekeeping throughout his career at Cornell. Both courses were extremely popular, attracting students as much by the reputation of the provocative teacher as by the timeless appeal of learning about the intricate societies of bees.

Roger A. Morse died peacefully, in his sleep, on Friday, May 12, 2000, at his farm outside Ithaca. Besides his wife, Mary Louise Morse, whom he married in 1951, two daughters, Susan and Mary Ann, and one son, Joseph, survive him. To those of us who knew him well, the memory of his generosity, humor, outspoken manner, and avid affection for the bees will long live on.

*Donald M. Burgett, Nicholas W. Calderone, Arthur A. Muka, Thomas D. Seeley*