

HONORARY MEMBERS

José Sarukhán Kermes

Dr. José Sarukhán Kermes has been awarded Honorary Membership in the Ecological Society of America in recognition of his seminal contributions to plant ecology and his leadership of ecological research and conservation activities in Mexico.

Dr. Sarukhán was born in Mexico City in 1940. After receiving his undergraduate degree from the National University of Mexico (UNAM) in 1962 and his M.Sc. from the Agricultural University of Chapingo in 1965, he went to the University of Wales at Bangor to work for his Ph.D. with John Harper. His doctoral dissertation, completed in 1972, resulted

in several influential papers on plant demography. These studies of buttercups are milestones in plant ecology, distinguished equally for grounding in demographic theory and for careful field studies to follow all stages of the life history from seed to seed.

John Harper likes to relate the following anecdote. Sarukhán's studies were conducted in an experimental pasture adjacent to the tracks of the railroad from Bangor to London. On passing the field in the early morning, the engineer noticed a man stretched out on the ground, but paid little attention. On seeing the same person in the same position on his re-



turn run in the evening, the engineer stopped the train, thinking he had discovered a dead body. Great was his embarrassment on learning that the "body" was just a dedicated graduate student down on his belly counting seedlings!

After completing his PH.D., Dr. Sarukhán returned to Mexico, where he soon established the pattern of research and leadership that has marked his professional career. As the foremost ecologist in Mexico, he has continued his studies of demography and related areas of plant ecology. He is author or coauthor of five books and more than 60 papers. Particularly noteworthy are his book, co-edited with R. Dirzo, *Perspectives in Plant Population Ecology*, which summarized the state of knowledge in that fast-growing field, and his field studies of the tropical palm (*Astrocaryum mexicanum*), a pioneering work on the demography of a tropical tree.

Almost immediately after returning from Wales, Dr. Sarukhán began to assume in-

creasingly influential positions of scientific leadership in Mexico. At UNAM he served as Chairman of the Department of Botany, Director of the Institute of Biology, member of the Board of Directors of the University, and is presently Vice-Chancellor for Science. He was President of the Botanical Society of Mexico and Honorary President of the Association for Tropical Biology. He was elected to the National Academy of Sciences of Mexico in 1975, and served as its President in 1984–1985. He has been active in conservation, most notably in studying regeneration of tropical forests, influencing environmental legislation, and establishing tropical reserves and field stations on both coasts of Mexico. But perhaps his greatest influence is through the young scientists whom he identified while undergraduates, sent abroad for doctoral training, and then employed in the Center for Ecology at UNAM. This distinguished group, which includes R. Dirzo, D. Piñero, J. Sobrón, C. Vásquez, M. Maass, and M. Franco, provides Mexico with outstanding basic and applied research that spans the full breadth of contemporary ecology.

Perhaps the most impressive thing about Dr. Sarukhán is that he has attained international distinction as a scientist and has had great influence on scientific and conservation policy within his country at such a young age. We can expect many more contributions in the years to come.

Written by James H. Brown with assistance from Gerardo Ceballos Selection Committee

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