

Frank E. Egler

Many of us, upon opening a new issue of *Ecology*, look first for another of the trenchant book reviews by a man whose career illustrates the "individualistic concept" as applied to the ecologist himself—Frank E. Egler. Because of his important and long-sustained work as book reviewer, seminar-leader and advisor, and his research in the science of vegetation and the art of its management, Dr. Egler is the 1978 recipient of the Distinguished Service Citation of the Ecological Society of America.

Although centered on his native New York City and on Connecticut, Egler's career-orbit extended outward to Hawaii, Europe, Southeast Asia and the forests of Northern South America. Beyond that, he has traveled the world and read very widely—a brilliant and articulate generalist who has written five books and over 200 papers in fields from ecology and conservation to electrical engineering and physics.

After his Chicago bachelor's degree with Henry C. Cowles, a Minnesota master's with William S. Cooper, and a Yale doctorate with G. E. Nichols, Egler was employed at the Bishop Museum in Hawaii, and at the New York State College of Forestry at Syracuse. From 1941 through 1944, he served at and later directed the chicle experiment station of Beech Nut Packing and American Chicle Companies in British Honduras. More recently he has held appointments at the University of Connecticut, American Museum of Natural History, Yale University, and Wesleyan University, and often as guest lecturer elsewhere.

About 1945 he became interested in the

proper management of vegetation on the roughly 75 million acres of U.S. land in roadsides, power-line rights of way, and transmitter sites. He found that the usual broadcast spraying is ineffective, expensive, devastating, and flouts ecological principles. The resulting grass cover invites reinvasion by trees, whereas most needs can be met by a low shrub cover which remains much more stable. Egler led in developing selective methods which are more enduringly economical and yield high values for conservation and natural beauty. This work brought him into collision with the conventions of commercial "brush control," usually directed by engineers innocent of botanical knowledge. He figured prominently in the bitter controversies on the insecticide-herbicide issue. As a friend and defender of Rachel Carson, who also found that "committing the truth" falls short of universal approbation, Egler trod on some toes, generally well-chosen ones.

One of his long-term experimental sites has been his own land in Connecticut, Aton Forest, where he has made his home since 1945. There he provides demonstrations of vegetation management in action. His work with young ecologists is gratefully acknowledged by a number of now-established professionals. As a member of the ESA Committee on Ethics, he is credited with important suggestions. His critical challenge to the simplistic Clementsian view of plant succession has had wide influence on ecological thought.

In cultural and intellectual life generally, criticism is an active professional field in its own right. Not so in science, even though this might be equally beneficial.

Here most of the creative criticism comes during the manuscript-review process, almost always anonymously. Egler, however, will review manuscripts only if allowed to sign his comments. LaMont C. Cole published an appreciation of Egler as a person "with a social conscience, a logician and philosopher who is uncommonly intolerant of ignorance and mediocrity." Egler's book for laymen on *The Way of Science* reveals the author as a broad-gauge interpreter and useful critic of science.

It is said that old-time river fishermen would add a catfish or two to the tank, to stir the other species into action and thus keep them alive. Frank Egler has long played a similar, vitally stimulating role among his fellows in our ecological tank.

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