

**W. F. Blair: Academician, Scholar**  
25 June 1912–9 February 1985

*Academician.* A member of an academy for the promotion of science, art or literature.

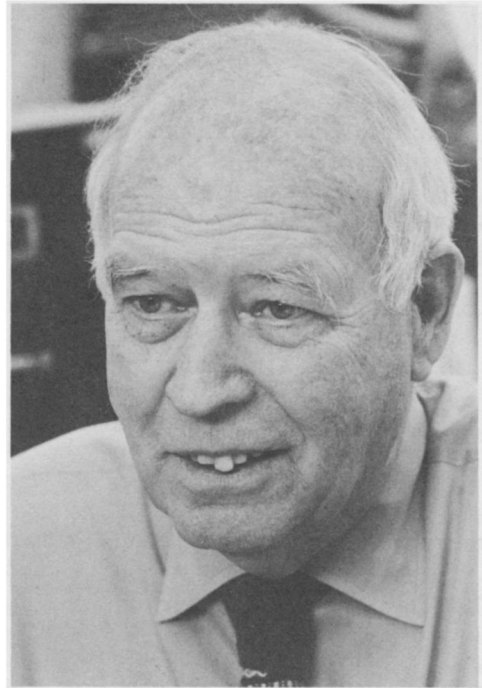
Dr. W. Frank Blair was a member of more than two dozen professional local, state, national and international societies. He was a founding member of the Society for the Study of Evolution and the Southwestern Association of Naturalists. He has served in leadership capacities in many of these societies, as trustee, governor, council member, and director. In addition he served as Vice President of the Texas Academy of Science (1951) and the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists (1955) and as President of the Ecological Society of America (1963), The Society for the Study of Evolution (1962), Southwestern Association of Naturalists (1953–1955) and the American Institute of Biological Sciences (1972). He received the Distinguished Service Award of the AIBS in 1975 and the Joseph Priestly Award of Dickinson College in 1977. His clear record of service as an academician covers a number of decades.

*Scholar.* A learned person; one versed in any branch, or in many branches of knowledge; a person of thorough literary or scientific attainments.

Dr. Blair published more than 150 papers on evolution, genetics, ecology and population biology of amphibians, reptiles and mammals. Less than 10% of these are coauthored, a remarkable record in the days of multiple authors, many graduate students, and great emphasis on productivity as measured by quantity. These papers were written while directing the research of dozens of graduate students and encouraging and supporting postdoctoral visitors from many other universities.

Four themes are identifiable in Frank Blair's early research: population biology, isolating mechanisms, genetics of natural populations, and community analysis. While these themes are interrelated, they lead almost deterministically to his great emphasis of the 1970's on big biology and the analysis of ecosystems.

Frank Blair's studies of the population biology of the beach mouse and of the rusty lizard set standards unrivaled in their time and



never surpassed by those of us applying his methods to other species. These autecological studies provided measures of intimate details of the daily life, and extensive statistical estimates of the population parameters of these animals. The studies of coat colors and patterns in small mammals and a basic interest in the process of speciation led naturally to studies of mating processes and isolating mechanisms in mammals and in amphibians. The use of nonmorphological characteristics for the determination of systematic status included analysis of call, hybridization, mate selection, and character displacement, and culminated in the extensive study of the evolution of the genus *Bufo*. Community analysis started early in Oklahoma, grew in the swamps and Everglades of Florida, expanded in the forests of Michigan and the western deserts and reached a peak in the annual analysis of several parts of west Texas during successive years in the late 1940's. From these, from the effects of expanding urbanization and agriculturalization, and the natural variation of weather came a deeper understanding of the role of man in changing the ecosystem. All of this led naturally to his participation in and eventually to his assuming a major leadership role in the United

States commitment to the International Biological Program.

Frank served as director of the United States IBP program during the critical years when the necessity for adequate funding led to interaction with many components of the scientific world in the United States and abroad and to extensive efforts with supportive members of Congress. He was very influential in assuring a thorough examination of the diverse environments of the world.

Frank's greatest support came from Fern Blair. For many years she served as companion and field assistant, overseer of equipment, student assistants, travel arrangements, and keeper of the variety of strange coins needed to cope with international exchange. Her ability to remember names of wives and children and many details of their travels and accomplishments contributed to the always pleasant experience of visiting the East Austin homestead.

The National Science Foundation, the Atomic Energy Commission and the Department of Defense all supported his research, but the strongest impetus came from his boundless energy, his continuing enthusiasm for new ideas, and his ability to complete a

variety of detailed and thoughtful observations and analyses. His students now work throughout the United States, his colleagues have originated in all parts of the world. Frank's image was always dynamic. Observers often felt he was prepared to slay dragons; sometimes he appeared to do so.

As a teacher his lectures were always detailed and completely organized, presenting a maximum amount of information in brief and concise phrases. But his value as a teacher far surpassed his role in the classroom, and certainly meets the following description:

Such are the best teachers: a dogma learned is only a new error—the old one was perhaps as good; but a spirit communicated is a perpetual possession.

These best teachers climb beyond teaching to the plane of art: it is themselves, and what is best in themselves that they communicate.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. L. Stevenson. *The British Weekly*, May 1887.

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