

Resolution of Respect

Robert Lewis Burgess

1931–2002



The Ecological Society lost a strong supporter with the passing of Dr. Robert Lewis Burgess on 16 March 2002 at his home in Jamesville, New York. Bob was born in Kalamazoo, Michigan, on 12 September 1931. His family moved to Milwaukee in 1934, where he spent his school years. During his undergraduate years at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and then during the post-Korean War period, Bob worked in the college-student Truck Drivers Job Program for the *Milwaukee Journal* Circulation Department. While he attended classes, the job was compatible with his interest in the new baseball team in that city, the Milwaukee Braves. During the Korean War he spent two years in the U.S. Army as a cryptographer, serving with a translation unit in Yokahama, Japan. He completed a B.S. from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 1957, and his M.S. (1959), and Ph.D. (1961) at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. The doctorate was supervised by both the late Dr. John T. Curtis and Dr. Grant Cottam, because Curtis died before Bob could complete his thesis.

I shared an office with Bob during our graduate work in plant ecology at Wisconsin, 1957–1960, while we both worked under John Curtis. He then joined the faculty of Arizona State University in 1960, stimulating his interest in desert ecology, and in 1963 moved to North Dakota State University (NDSU) in Fargo. During 1965–1966, he pursued his arid region interests as a visiting professor at Pahlavi University in Shiraz, Iran. While at NDSU, Bob supervised a number of students investigating the riparian forests of the northern Great Plains rivers. Dr. Carter Johnson, now at South Dakota State University, is one of the best known of these students (see Burgess et al. 1973).

In 1970, Bob took the position of Deputy Director of the U.S. International Biological Program's Eastern Deciduous Forest Biome project at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, working with Dr. Stanley Auerbach. Later, he served there as Program Manager, Section Head, and Senior Research Staff member. While at Oak Ridge, Bob pursued with Dr. David Sharpe the work on postsettlement forest island dynamics for which he became well known (see Burgess and Sharpe 1981). A major career change occurred in 1981 when Bob took the position as Professor and Chairman of the Department of Environmental and Forest Biology at the State University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, a position he retained until 1998. The quality of that Department's programs and faculty continue as a testament to his vision and management.

Bob's research interests spanned a wide range of environments and subjects, from North American and Middle Eastern deserts, to grasslands and deciduous forests. He also became interested in the role of ecological science in environmental management, and his later writings reflect concerns for land use change, acid rain effects, and conservation. One of his most valuable services stems from his long-time interest in the history of the science of ecology where, together with Dr. Robert P. McIntosh, Bob developed a concern for ESA's records and roots. On ESA's Historical Records Committee he constantly reminded ESA's leaders of the need to preserve the records of early ecologists and their working environment. In this context he accumulated a truly remarkable collection of early (and recent) maps of vegetation from all over the world, now housed in the Map Department at Syracuse University, accessible through SU's Bird Library online catalog. His wife Vera also donated over 1000 books from Bob's library to the SUNY-ESF Cranberry Lake Research Station.

Bob Burgess served the ESA in a wide variety of other roles throughout his career. From 1965 to 1973 he was on ESA's Membership Committee, and later served on the Ethics and Professionalism Committee from 1971–1980 and 1982–1984. It was through this Committee that he helped establish ESA's current Board on Professional Certification. He was ESA's Program Chair from 1978 to 1980, and in 1985–1986 served (with Dr. Mohan Wali) as Co-Chair for the IV International Congress of Ecology, which met in 1986 with ESA in Syracuse, New York. He was a member of ESA's Board of Editors (1971–1981), and was Book Review Editor of *Ecology* from 1971 to 1978. In 1982 he assumed the chairmanship of the Committee on Historical Records, a role he continued to support throughout the rest of his life.

Bob contributed in other professional institutions as well. He served on the Governing Board, Membership Committee, and Meetings Committee of the American Institute of Biological Sciences. He was elected a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in 1988. He also served as an officer locally in Sigma Xi, The Nature Conservancy, the science academies of Arizona and North Dakota, and as a member of the editorial boards of several journals. One of his most lasting publications will be his 110-page biographical bibliography of 575 American ecologists (see Burgess 1996) with 2400 cited references. To recognize the cumulative significance of all his mid-career contributions, Bob was awarded ESA's Distinguished Service Citation in 1988 (see Cooper and Wali 1989).

Bob Burgess retired from the College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse in 1998, a few years after having had heart bypass surgery. Despite also living with diabetes most of his professional life, in the end he lost a brief struggle with lung cancer. Bob is survived by his wife Vera of Jamesville, New York, his five children and 14 grandchildren. However, it is probably his unique research, and his contributions to the Ecological Society of America as an institution, that we will most remember, and that will long carry on his influence.

Literature cited

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