

Obituary



Beverly Rathcke
1945–2011

Beverly Rathcke—scholar, mentor, friend—died peacefully in her home in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on 6 January 2011. Beverly was born in 1945 in Wadena, Minnesota. Her interests were evident early, as many photos from her childhood scrapbooks show her with cats, dogs, or flowers. She obtained a B.S. in Biology at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. From there, she used a Fulbright fellowship to study entomology at Imperial College London, where she gained a Master's degree in Entomology. She received her doctorate from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 1973, and did postdoctoral work at Cornell University with Dick Root. She served on the faculty in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Michigan from 1978 until 2010.

Beverly's research focused on community ecology, specifically, plant–animal interactions such as herbivory, competition, and pollination ecology. She published some of the first papers using null models in community ecology. She researched how environmental changes, such as introduced species, habitat fragmentation, and hurricane disturbances, affect species' reproductive success. Her more recent research included field experiments concerning introduced plants in Michigan and the pollination ecology of mangroves in the Bahamas, Mexico, and Florida. In addition to her mangrove studies, she spent much of the last decade working on the pollination ecology of a number of plant species in the Bahamas, most of which are endemic to either the Bahamas or the Caribbean Basin. Because of her extensive work through the Gerace Research Centre on San Salvador Island, her name has been added to a memorial plaque honoring researchers who contributed greatly to our scientific understanding of the Bahamas.

She loved to travel, appreciated art and architecture, and loved to cook, and she wove in sightseeing and food exploration with her research. She was quite proud of her field season in the Bahamas in Michigan's cold, wintry January. She took a cooking class in Oaxaca, Mexico, combining that trip with coastal mangrove research. She was an accomplished Indian and Chinese cook and hosted potlucks where graduate students vied to compete with her dishes. Over the past decade, she traveled to visit Frank Lloyd Wright homes and Chihuly glass exhibits all across the Midwest. Despite her love of travel, she was also dedicated to her own home and garden, and to pets, including her beloved Keeshond, Kodi, and various cats.

Beverly taught popular undergraduate and graduate courses, including undergraduate Ecology and a longstanding graduate seminar in Plant–Animal Interactions. Her Plant–Animal Interactions seminar was really a course in academic survival, where she taught her own and other graduate students how to structure their research questions, present ideas and results to each other, and critique constructively. Students who studied only animals or only plants were welcomed wholeheartedly.

She served as doctoral chair or cochair for 29 students, and was a committee member for another 54 students; her dedicated work with graduate students was recognized with the University of Michigan's Rackham Distinguished Graduate Mentoring award in 2008. Her close-knit community of former students came from across the country to honor her at her retirement in 2010. She had an exultant laugh that will echo always in the minds of her friends. While she thoroughly enjoyed life, she died at peace, with few regrets. She will be missed, but lives on in the memories, writing, and scientific inquiries of her friends and students.

Obituary written by Dunrie Greiling