

awards

EMINENT ECOLOGIST

John L. Harper

During 30 years of research and publication, John Lander Harper revolutionized plant ecology, adding demography to the more established areas of vegetation science and studies of plant communities. No one has had more influence on plant population ecology during the period of its coming of age.

John Harper was born in 1925 into a farming family and developed his early interest in natural history as a boy in Rugby, England. He took a doctoral degree in agricultural botany from Oxford University and served as a lecturer there from 1953–1960. He moved to the University College of North Wales in Bangor as Professor of Agricultural Botany. After a few years his department merged with the Department of Botany to form the new School of Plant Biology under his direction. From this base, Professor Harper built an international center for the emerging field of plant population ecology, which subsequently became synonymous with his name. Seminal and influential papers emerged on a wide range of topics, including the Darwinian approach to plant ecology, the role of soil microtopography on seed and seedling behavior, seedling safe sites, the biology of weeds, the coexistence of similar species, survival and thinning phenomena, and the modular construction of plants, to name a few. His book, *The Population Biology of Plants*, 1977, is a major synthesis and compendium of the conceptual advances and empirical work that have made Professor Harper's accomplishments and authority in the field recognized throughout the world. In 1978 Professor Harper was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of London, followed in 1980 by appointment to the Agricultural Research Council. Two years ago John Harper took early retirement in order to devote more time to research and to public service.

In the USA, John Harper's pioneering work taught ecologists a new way of thinking about plants. His approach not only produced a new science but also affected research on physiological ecology, the evolution of life histo-



ries, and plant communities. Professor Harper's influence on American thought was underscored recently by his election to the National Academy of Sciences (USA).

Professor Harper's influence stems from more than his published works. He has always been a generous donor of time and support to students and colleagues through lectures, discussions, correspondence, editing, and personal encouragement. Numerous young ecologists from around the world have made the trip to Bangor to be stimulated and challenged by the ideas, probing questions, and enthusiasm of this eminent scholar. From the mid-1960's onward it was typical to have as many as two dozen visiting scientists, post-doctoral fellows, and students in his laboratory. A recent count showed 10 countries represented among the current group of 12 scientists, underscoring the international nature of the Harperian School. John Harper's

bibliography of more than 100 scientific publications represents his formal contribution to ecology; to this must be added the vast impact made through his continual stimulation and encouragement to others. It is with honor that the Ecological Society of America

awards him the Eminent Ecologist citation for 1984.

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