

OBITUARY

Professor Gwilym O. Evans (1924-2017)

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With the sad death of Gwilym Owen Evans on 6th June of this year, the acarological community lost one of its great researchers and teachers, and a good friend and mentor to many of us around the world.

Gwilym was born in the village of Llandre, Ceredigion, west Wales, on 25th May 1924. He attended schools in England and Wales before beginning his biological education at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth (now Aberystwyth University). After the award of his Bachelor of Science in 1944, he took a job in England at Birmingham's Water Pollution Research Laboratories, where he worked on early research into the effect of pesticides on the fauna and flora of waterways. Subsequently, Gwilym returned to his native Wales and Aberystwyth University to carry out research for a Master of Science (awarded in 1947) and then his Ph.D. (1949). His Master's project concerned the bionomics of the

sheep ked *Melophagus ovinus*, most pertinent to the economic welfare of the sheep farmers of Wales, which Gwilym would tell you is a country with more sheep than people! The improved method he devised for observing the ked life cycle was the subject of his first scientific paper, published in the prestigious journal *Nature* in 1946. Gwilym continued to work on ectoparasites of domesticated animals for his doctorate, initially focussing on the sheep ked, but later changing to a study of the bionomics and economic importance of the tick *Ixodes ricinus* in Wales.

Following university, Gwilym joined the famous Rothamsted Experimental Station in Hertfordshire, England, to study the feeding behaviour and population dynamics of small arthropods, particularly insects and mites, and their contribution to soil fertility. This area of ecology was in its infancy and the work, which included frequent visits to the arachnid section of the then British Museum (Natural History), fuelled Gwilym's life-long interest in mite taxonomy. In 1951, he was appointed to the Museum's permanent staff as Head of Arachnida and, once there, applied his energy and enthusiasm to developing much needed taxonomic work on the Acari. He soon built up the staff complement by bringing in additional researchers and upset the Museum's rigidly hierarchical structure of the time by actually allowing his junior staff to carry out research projects. Just one year into this appointment, he participated in the Museum's expedition to the East African Ruwenzori Mountains. On his return, he presented one of the authors (DG) with a slide bearing just one specimen of Don's favourite mite, *Acarus siro*, Linnaeus, 1758, which Gwilym said he had taken from a tree-hole half way up Ruwenzori Mountain. This was impressive, since, to Don's knowledge, it is the only 'natural' record for this species outside of stored foodstuffs. The two came to the mutual explanation that it was down to some previous intrepid African explorer finding an eco-friendly place to deposit the remains of their sandwich lunch!

Gwilym's time at the Museum was his most prolific in terms of publications produced. The majority of papers concerned the morphology and taxonomy

of the Mesostigmata, and included his fundamentally important studies of the chaetotaxy of their appendages. The setal nomenclature and positional formulae he devised are still routinely used by authors in descriptions today, so gradually adding to the character data available for systematic studies. His revisions of numerous mesostigmatid families, plus reports of new faunal records and descriptions of unnamed taxa in other orders, greatly enhanced our knowledge of British mites. These data were synthesized in two of the few comprehensive works on the native fauna. The first, published in 1961 with Gordon Sheals and Don Macfarlane, was *Terrestrial Acari of the British Isles*, which served as an introduction to mites and ticks. The second, *Mesostigmatic mites of Britain and Ireland* (1979, with W.M. Till), included keys to all the recorded families and genera. Gwilym's detailed and well-illustrated morphological accounts have stood the test of time and his publications are still sought after and routinely used for specimen identification. Because his studies based on the British fauna cover many taxa with a much wider geographical distribution, they also have a worldwide relevance. The significance of Gwilym's acarological research was acknowledged in 1967 when Aberystwyth University awarded him a Doctorate of Science for a body of work entitled 'Contribution to the external morphology, classification and ecology of the Acari: Anactinochaeta'. In the same year, he left the Museum.

Following his departure, Gwilym held short appointments as Professor of Zoology at the University of Maryland, USA (1967-68) and as a Senior Fellow at the New University of Ulster, Coleraine, Northern Ireland, now Ulster University at Coleraine (1969). He joined University College Dublin (UCD) in 1970, as Professor of Agricultural Zoology in the Faculty of Agriculture, which was then based at Glasnevin, on the opposite side of the city to the main College campus at Belfield. His arrival coincided with a decade of great change, when student and staff numbers were expanding greatly despite limited facilities and accommodation at Glasnevin. At this time, a process of substantial departmental consolidation and movement to the Belfield campus was well underway, although the transfer of the

Agriculture Faculty was not completed until 1979. In the interim, improvisation was the order of the day, and Gwilym demonstrated considerable flair in that regard. A memorable example of this was his oversight of the adaptation of a commercial vehicle for fieldwork. The vehicle was equipped with all necessary facilities, and modified to accommodate the tallest research student (at the time 193 cm, and aptly named Longworth). Although it quickly became known as the 'ice-cream van' because of its external appearance, internally it was well designed, and served its intended purpose admirably for several years.

Extensive changes in teaching programmes at UCD were also occurring in the 1970s, and Gwilym was an enthusiastic participant in the various discussions and curriculum design/ development-related activities which were taking place at that time. He had a considerable influence on the upgrading and development of course modules in Applied Zoology in particular, one very tangible outcome of his input being the much-improved draftsmanship that was evident in laboratory manuals. Those of us at UCD who had participated in the University of Nottingham Acarology courses were particularly aware of the enthusiasm and flair that Gwilym brought to the teaching of his chosen subject, and it was gratifying to see the same qualities being brought to the teaching of a wide range of topics at undergraduate and postgraduate level. He was intensely interested in students, and constantly challenged them to engage with the subject matter rather than being passive recipients of information. He could be equally challenging to staff, and would occasionally emerge from his office in order to have his say when a particularly interesting tutorial was taking place in the adjacent seminar room.

Gwilym arrived at UCD at a time of considerable expansion in both domestic and international opportunities for research funding. His enthusiasm was infectious, and he created an atmosphere in which research and scientific enquiry were highly valued. He was an acknowledged leader in the field of acarology, which remained his core area of interest. He was also very supportive of research across a wide spectrum of the applied Biological Sciences,

notably in areas such as Invertebrate Ecology, Animal Parasitology and Wildlife Ecology. He was always particularly enthusiastic about work with an acarological content, especially when rare or possibly new species were encountered, as they frequently were during soil ecology studies. Unsurprisingly, postgraduate students who displayed an aptitude for acarine taxonomy and systematics received his encouragement as he sought above all to pass on his particular skills and knowledge. He, for example, passed his enthusiastic interest in ticks, particularly *Ixodes ricinus*, to one of the authors (JG), who he appointed as a junior lecturer more than 40 years ago and is still working in this field of research.

It was largely due to Gwilym's efforts that the aforementioned Acarology course was established and ran from 1962 to 1987. It was held biennially in the summer on Nottingham's Agriculture campus at Sutton Bonington and provided a comprehensive introduction to mites and ticks. Gwilym, his good friends and fellow lecturers Don Griffiths and Don Macfarlane, and organiser Paul Murphy made learning fun, not least via the repartee that flashed between them, especially Gwilym and DG. Indeed, the latter still remembers the argument the two had for over 10 summers about the exact form and function of the acarine mouthparts, resolved eventually, most amicably, at the local public house. Passing on his knowledge was of great importance to Gwilym and it must have been very rewarding for him to see so many of the students go on to become eminent researchers in institutes around the world. Fortunately, Gwilym's contribution to the course lives on in his much consulted book *Principles of Acarology* (1992), which was based on the lectures he gave on acarine functional morphology, biology and taxonomy.

Gwilym took on a variety of responsibilities in the scientific community. An important example was his term as a Commissioner of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN), serving as British representative from 1960 to 1970. In 1965, he was made Secretary to the Commission, but resigned in 1967 after his appointment as Professor of Zoology at the University of Maryland. From

1967 to 1968, he was also a member of the International Trust for Zoological Nomenclature, an organisation set up to provide financial support to the ICZN Secretariat. He served as a Council member of the Linnean Society of London (1959-1962, 1966-1967) and the Systematics Association (1955-1958), and was appointed Chairman of the joint Royal Irish Academy and National Science Council Committee on 'Man and the biosphere' (1979). Gwilym was President of the Sixth International Congress of Acarology held in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1982, and edited the Proceedings of the Second International Acarology Congress (Sutton Bonington, England, 1967) published in 1969. Other roles in scientific publishing were an editorship of the *Journal of Natural History* (1957-73) and membership of the editorial boards of *Acarologia* (1962-2000), *International Journal of Acarology* (1975-1994) and *Parasitology* (Cambridge) (1962-1966). Gwilym's expertise was called upon as an external examiner for Queen's University Belfast, Ulster University at Coleraine, and the universities of Bangor, Leeds, Nottingham and Reading.

The distinction of Gwilym's research and service were honoured by numerous awards. Foremost among them was his election in 1973 to Membership of the Royal Irish Academy (MRIA), the highest academic honour of the Republic of Ireland and given in recognition of the excellence of his published work. He was made a Fellow of the UK's Institute of Biology, now the Royal Society of Biology, for his contribution to the advancement of the biological sciences. After being Honorary Secretary of the Ray Society (named for the eminent British naturalist John Ray) from 1957 to 1961, he was made an Honorary Vice-President in 1961. Honorary Vice-Presidencies are given in recognition of conspicuous service to the Society and are lifetime appointments. For his outstanding contribution to acarology, Gwilym was awarded the International Berlese Award (1978) (reported in *Int. J. Acarol.*, 1979, 5: 168) and Honorary Lifetime Membership of the International Congress of Acarology (1998). Since his death, his legacy has been commemorated as an Eternal Member of the Congress.

Gwilym was a most personable and sociable per-

son, although his enthusiasm for Welsh rugby was not always appreciated on Monday mornings at UCD following yet another Irish defeat by Wales during their period of dominance in the 1970s. His retirement from UCD in 1983 following a period of poor health was premature. Fortunately, he subsequently made a good recovery and lived to enjoy a lengthy retirement with his wife Angela in West Sussex, England, memorably revisiting UCD after he left during a holiday cruise stopover. However, he did not leave acarology and continued to publish until 1998. One of the authors (AB) was fortunate to enjoy the hospitality of Gwilym and Angela at their home after they moved back to the UK. Gwilym was always interested in acarological news and to hear about the many changes that were happening at the Museum. His continued readiness to discuss aspects of acarology and to be a valuable source of advice was greatly appreciated.

Gwilym was one of the few remaining acarologists with such a complete knowledge of the subject, not just of systematics, but also of biology and ecology. He was a high energy character with an ever-present enquiring mind and sense of fun. He will be much missed.

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