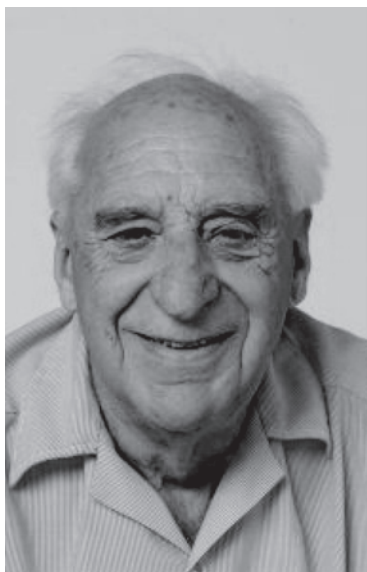


IN MEMORIAM



Dr COURTENAY SMITHERS 1925-2011

“The entomologist Courtenay Smithers, who died on May 12, 2011, leaves a legacy of international recognition for Australian entomology and a distinguished career spanning more than five decades.” (Dr David Britton, Collection Manager, Entomology: Australian Museum, 2011).

It is fortunate to be able to meet such a scientist, such a gentle and pleasant man, a typical enthusiast for his work, as Dr Courtenay Smithers. After international congresses in Australia, Marija Ivezic and Irma Kalinovic were invited by Dr Smithers and his wife Smila to be their guests. This was early in 1994 and in 2004. We spent an unforgettable time with Courtenay and his family, collecting insects (Psocodea), observing butterflies and other insects and birds. At that time, Courtenay was already retired.

Courtenay Smithers was born in Pretoria, South Africa in 1925. After his father's death in 1934, his family migrated to England in 1938. His early career choice was football. During his schooling his interests lay in natural history and he spent much time watching birds and collecting insects. During World War II he served in the British Army from 1943, arriving in France on D-Day. He was taken prisoner and held captive until May of the following year. Following his discharge from the Army in 1947, he returned to South Africa to study at the University of Pretoria. He moved to Rhodes University to further his work in entomology, completing a master's degree in the early 1950s. His first work was in collecting and researching insects of the order Psocoptera (Psocoidea), commonly called bark lice. These insects are mostly unknown to the general public. Hundred of species occur in natural habitats and in stored grain and other products, and at that time most of them were completely unknown species. It was in Rhodesia that he

met his future wife Smila, and the two of them became expert collectors of bark lice, with Courtenay developing a strong taxonomic knowledge of the group. In June 1959, Courtenay started to work in the Australian Museum in Sydney as Curator of Insects. Most of the Australian fauna of bark lice and other insects was at the time unknown. Courtenay's research with intensive field work and a three-month expedition to Cape York and surroundings, meant that his insect taxonomy encompassed fauna from other parts of the Southern Hemisphere. Through such work, he developed an understanding of the links between the fauna of South Africa, South America and Australia. He encouraged a loans program of specimens with other researchers and institutions worldwide and part of his legacy is that the Australian Museum now has the best-developed bark lice collections in the Southern hemisphere, and one of the best in the world.

Courtenay maintained that a strong connection between public and museum scientists was important. His commitment to maintaining communications with the public remains a crucial part of the museum's practice. He also had a strong interest in the conservation of biodiversity and was pivotal in the establishment of a national park on Norfolk Island. His research into the patterns of Wanderer butterflies was another project that attracted public attention. He initiated a program according to which volunteers tagged butterflies, and contributors in New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria recaptured the tagged butterflies and sent back specimens and data on butterfly movements. Many people from non-science backgrounds found themselves engaging in the biology and ecology of insects through this project. Dr Smithers attend many international congresses and other meetings (Congress of Entomologists held in 1964, London, in 1968 in Moscow, in Canberra 1972). He was a member of the Australian Entomological Society, in which in 1983 he was given honorary life membership, and of the Entomological Society of New South Wales (1984).

With typical enthusiasm, Courtenay took on the role of Deputy Director the Museum in 1967. He was awarded a PhD from Rhodes University in 1970 for his world revision of the higher classification of the bark lice. From 1970, he continued his work as principal purator at the Museum until his retirement in 1985.

Dr Smithers newer considered that retirement had anything to do with ceasing to research, and he continued researching and publishing on bark lice, scorpion flies, butterflies and lacewings. Among many notable publications in entomology, he co-authored Psocoptera (Insecta): World Catalogue and Bibliography and

wrote the chapters on Zoraptera and Pscoptera for the landmark CSIRO publication *Insects of Australia*. He was author and co-author of more than 280 articles, books and chapters in books, and his last publication on beekeeping is still in the press, having been accepted by a publisher literally days before he passed away.

As well as making a great contribution to the study of insects, Dr Smithers was a friend and mentor to many and a gentle person who will be greatly missed, not just by the entomological community, but by many people interested in the world of natural history. He is survived by his wife Smila and sons Graeme and Hartley.

From an article by Dr David Britton, Collection Manager, Australian Museum, 28 July 2011.

Irma Kalinović
Marija Ivezić