

Obituary

Dr George Ledingham 1911-2006

The Canadian Botanical Association was saddened to learn that an eminent botanist and CBA/ABC member, Dr George Ledingham had passed away on October 18th 2006 at the grand age of 95 years and 8 months. He was predeceased by his wife Marjorie, and is survived by his son Beattie, his grandsons and great granddaughters.

George Ledingham, was born in Moose Jaw in 1911, and graduated from the University of Saskatchewan, before obtaining a doctorate in plant genetics at the University of Wisconsin in 1939. He spent the war years working on the family farm and then moved to Regina College to teach Biology. The college then became the University of Regina and Dr Ledingham continued teaching for a total of forty years. He greatly influenced many of his students with his enthusiasm and interest in conservation and the environment.

Dr. Ledingham retired from fulltime teaching in 1978 and was named professor emeritus and curator of the herbarium at Regina, a herbarium which he had established.

He gained an international reputation over the years as a conservationist, a plant ecologist and an expert in prairie ecosystems. In 1986 the University of Regina conferred an honorary doctorate of laws on him and in 1990 named the George F. Ledingham Herbarium in his honour. The herbarium, originally established at Regina College more than 60 yr ago by George Ledingham contains around 50,000 specimens, including 10,000 bryophytes and 10,000 lichens. Most of these specimens were his own. For a time he was head of Biology at the University of Regina, but he continuously curated the herbarium which now bears his name. He, in fact, attended to the herbarium well into his nineties and was still going in from time to time during his 94-95th years.

Much of his systematic work focused on *Astragalus* and over time he and his students studied chromosomes of hundreds of species and characterized the distinctive karyotypes of Old and New World species. Most of his travel was in search of *Astragalus* and in 1965 he discovered a new species on a dry hillside in Iran. Located 12 miles north of Shiraz, an ancient capital of Persia, it was named by R. C. Barneby as *A. ledinghamii*. A full page color photo of the holotype appears in the fall 2006 issue of the University of Regina magazine, Degrees, along with a few other specimens from his collection.

George contributed much to the accumulated knowledge of the flora of Saskatchewan and he was largely instrumental in establishing the Grasslands National Park in SW Saskatchewan. His conservation work was widely recognized and he received awards from Parks Canada, Environment Canada and the Canadian Nature Federation. He was also the recipient of a Canada 125 medal, the Saskatchewan Order of Merit and the Harkin Conservation Award, and was given an honorary membership in the Ottawa Field-Naturalists.



George Ledingham, working in the herbarium that bears his name. Photo courtesy of the Biology Department, University of Regina.

For about 10 years George was a member of the Core Conservation Committee of the Canadian Botanical Association. He also helped with the organization of Saskatchewan meetings of the CBA and led a field trip to the Big Muddy in the 1970's. He was an avid birder, seldom without binoculars, and one of the stalwarts of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society. He went out of his way to expose young people to nature, in and out of class, summer and winter, day and night. He included students of other disciplines, such as chemistry, as well as of biology and even members of their families on his outings around Saskatchewan. Summer was his favourite time and his home garden was glorious. Generous bunches of flowers were brought from there to the lab along, of course, with taxonomy lessons. He will be greatly missed by family, friends, students and colleagues, but he has left an enormous legacy.



Astragalus ledinghamii, Herbarium specimen prepared by George Ledingham. Photo courtesy of the Biology Department, University of Regina.

Continued

Gwen Jones, a former student and colleague of George, wrote the following poem on the occasion of his retirement in 1978. We present it here, as it sums up many of the characteristics which endeared him to his students and fellow botanists.

A is for Astragalus with flowers blue and pink!
B is for the brome grass which would drive a man to drink
C is for the cattle that around our station stand!
D is for the digger which is always in his hand!
E is for his energy that really makes us dizzy!
F is for the "Flora" which should keep him very busy!
G is for the Grasslands - he fought hard and long!
H is for the every hill he had to look beyond!
I is for the ideas in all the briefs he wrote!
J is for his joy on finding it's not brome! it's oats!
K is for the knowledge he imparts to all who seek!
L is for the logs we crossed on every creek!
M is for the miles he drives through mud and mire!
N is for the new plants he'll find when he retires!
O is for his old friends who wish him joy, NO cares!
P is for the plant press that he carries everywhere!
Q is the Qu'Appelle in which he "birds" for fun!
R is for the rain and mud - what happened to the sun?
S is for the specimens he collects in early spring!
T is for Taxonomy - to him that's everything!
U is for the umbrella whose use he does disdain!
V is for the van, which he likes to drive in rain!
W is for the waxwings he looks for in December!
X is for his x-students he always does remember!
Y is for his yearning to hear the coyotes call!
Z is for his zest for life he's given to us all!



Field trip to Big Muddy, (Sask) led by Dr George Ledingham, as part of a CBA/ABC meeting, sometime in the 1970s. George Ledingham is wearing a plaid shirt, on the left. Keith Winterhalder is kneeling in the foreground. Perhaps other members are recognisable?

Dianne Fahselt
University of Western Ontario

