

# ***Resolution of Respect***

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Robert G. Wetzel

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1936–2005

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From rather humble beginnings, Professor Robert G. Wetzel's ever-increasing knowledge of aquatic ecosystems touched countless colleagues, students, and laypersons around the world. Bob was born on 16 August 1936 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to German immigrant parents. He received his Ph.D from the University of California, Davis, with Professor Charles Goldman. Starting his professional career in 1965 as an Assistant Professor of Botany at Michigan State University, he progressed through the academic ranks to Professor in 1971. He moved to the University of Michigan to become Professor of Biology from 1986 to 1990. In 1990 he moved to the University of Alabama as the Bishop Professor of Biology, and in 2001 became Professor and in 2003 the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor in the Department of Environmental Sciences at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

At the time of his death (18 April 2005), Bob was one of the foremost aquatic ecologists in the world.

His academic credentials were impeccable and his scholarship impressive. He received many awards and accolades, including an honorary Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Uppsala, Sweden (1984), election to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the International Water Academy, the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, as Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), and was the first Tage Erlander National Professor of Sweden (1982–1983). He was awarded the Baldi Memorial Award (1989) and the Einar Naumann-August Thienemann Medal (1992) from the International Association of Theoretical and Applied Limnology (SIL), the Society of Wetland Scientists (SWS) Lifetime Achievement Award (2000), the Award of Distinction from the University of California, Davis (1988), the Burnum Distinguished Faculty Award from the University of Alabama (1994), Aquatic Ecologist of the Year 2002 award from the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the Russian Hutchinson Science Laureate Award

(2005). Bob was awarded the G. Evelyn Hutchinson medal from the American Society of Limnology and Oceanography in 1992 and served as ASLO's Vice President from 1979 to 1980 and President from 1980 to 1981.

He was the elected General Secretary and Treasurer for SIL for some 37 years. He was the first president of the International Association of Aquatic Vascular Plant Biologists, and was an Honorary Life Member of the Asociacion Argentina de Limnologia.

He was a preeminent freshwater ecologist. With a passion for wetlands, he increasingly was concerned and wrote about the need to protect freshwater ecosystems, because he understood their vital importance to all life on Earth. His studies on the nature and role of dissolved organic matter in aquatic ecosystems led to new concepts and understandings of how lakes and wetlands function. His professional work uniquely delineated and clarified the important ecological role of macrophytes in aquatic ecosystems. He was author or co-author of 23 books and more than 420 articles in scientific journals and books. His classic and scholarly textbook, *Limnology: Lake and River Ecosystems*, published in 2001, has been translated into four languages from the original English, and has been instrumental in training students worldwide since 1975. (The third edition was completely revised and expanded, with a new title.)

His service to his professional interests was

totally unselfish and massive, serving on a prodigious number of editorial boards, advisory committees, and examining committees, and giving lectures throughout the world. He also trained a large number of graduate students and postdoctoral associates, many of whom also became leaders in the field of freshwater ecology.

Bob was also known for his love of family (wife Carol of 45 years, four children, and nine grandchildren), reading books, listening to classical music, and painting. His quick, but gentle, smile was a welcome greeting to all, or a friendly invitation to engage in conversation. Nevertheless, it was his passion for aquatic ecosystems and scholarly work, his boundless energy, attention to detail, lack of sleep-time, and especially his kind, generous, and gentle spirit that defined his life. His standards of scholarship were exceptionally high, setting the bar high for all students and colleagues. He never "cut corners" in his science.

His death is a momentous loss for family, friends, colleagues, many past students and postdoctoral associates, and the entire aquatic and limnological research community. Robert Wetzel will be greatly missed, but his dedication to scholarship and to limnology will continue to inspire into the future. He was an outstanding colleague and a dear friend.

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