eminent ecologist, 1971

Thomas Park

Three polarities were visible when the Ecological Society of America was founded, and have kept it a lively organization ever since: botany versus zoology; ecology versus politics; and laboratory versus field ecology. No one has done more to resolve all three than Thomas Park. He began by reducing botany to its lowest terms, in the form of ground flour and dried brewers' yeast, and quickly showed that zoology cannot survive without botany. (Redi and Spallanzani had already proved that botany generates zoology spontaneously.) As editor of *Ecology,* a far more creative post than most readers or authors knew at the time, Park encouraged those applications we now call "relevant", from limnology and wildlife management to sociology and theology, while gently discouraging tendentiousness, in environmental politics as in the reporting of research. As an ecologist in an urban setting, and as an urbane but hard-minded product of Raymond Pearl's laboratory, he sought an experimental ecosystem that was slightly less confusing than the city of Chicago; and while the flour-beetle system he selected was pretty confused at first, he clarified both its zoological and its philosophical ambiguities. Meanwhile, he insisted that his students spend most of their time in the field, and bring their problems to the laboratory only when they had formulated them sharply enough to make the laboratory function as an ecosystem, as he himself had so brilliantly done.

Today, thanks to the work of the Chicago school, the *confusum-castaneum*-Adelina system is a near-perfect model of a complex demographic and genetic equilibrium. It is a more heterogeneous equilibrium than the one Willard Gibbs made famous in thermodynamics. If its mathematical description sometimes looks post-Gibbsian, the pivotal author of *Principles of Animal Ecology* can be expected soon to translate the description into clear English prose. If, as a model, it is a little deficient in its psychological dimensions for the taste of those modellers who favor vertebrates, the latter can still learn from it how psychiatry interacts with economics when both are reduced to lowest terms. It is not only that a population comes to equilibrium with its members and their effluvia, even when the botany is unlimited. When surrounded by an oceanic medium consisting of nothing but food, animals suffer sensory deprivation and prefer to eat each other.

As professor, dean, editor, committeeman, and officer of many learned societies, Tom Park's sage advice has been sought by thousands, and has been freely and wittily given. The Ecological Society honors itself by conferring on one of its most distinguished members the title of Eminent Ecologist for 1971.

The Nominating Committee:
Murray Buell
Paul Pearson
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