
Eugene P. Odum Award Richard B. Root Cornell University



Richard B. Root

The **Eugene P. Odum Award** recognizes an ecologist for outstanding work in ecology education. Through teaching, outreach, and mentoring activities, recipients of this award have demonstrated their ability to relate basic ecological principles to human affairs.

The Odum Award subcommittee wishes to congratulate this year's awardee for the Eugene P. Odum Award in Ecological Education, Dr. Richard "Dick" Root. The subcommittee was uniform in their praise for an ecologist whose primary contribution to the field of ecological education has been through setting an example as a researcher and a mentor. Dick has served as a mentor to 33 Ph.D. students and 4 M.S. students. Those cold numbers don't tell half of the story, however. The list reads like a "who's who" in ecology. Further, those students carried with them a mentoring model that they now employ, a deeply personal and enthusiastic view of nature and the role of being a naturalist in the field of ecology.

Dick's students know themselves as "Rootlets". One former student even wrote about his experience with Dick as being the "Root Cause" for his enjoyment and success as an ecologist. Former students confess that they were not even interested in ecology as a discipline until they ei-

ther met and worked with Dick or were in his Field Ecology class at Cornell. Then, after as few as two lectures, they found themselves "hooked". Many of these students confess to shamelessly copying Dick's model in the classroom and in the field in terms of mentoring both graduate and undergraduate students. With such an ever widening network of deeply devoted and enthusiastic mentees, it is obvious that Dick Root's impacts on ecological education are enormous.

The deeply personal and individual relationship that Dick built with each of his students was vitally important to them. One former student wrote, "Almost as if we were his biological children, Dick doted on us and, I am certain, lost sleep over our inevitable shortcomings, wondering where he might have gone wrong. Today I find myself treating my own students with similar regard." Another former student writes, "Believing I was a pretty good writer, I proudly presented Dick with the first draft of my dissertation. He wrote just one comment on the Introduction: "Yech!" That one word (and several analogues later on in the draft) served me as a one-trial learning experience in how to write ecology papers without either fluff or excessive dryness."

Dick Root also shines as a classroom teacher. His course, Field Ecology, at Cornell has received the highest student evaluation possible. The teaching model for this course emphasizes a cooperative and relaxed learning environment that still conveys the rigor of ecological inquiry. One student wrote on their evaluation form "I learned to think critically about ecological questions, and I even learned important life skills". Former students conveyed story after story about how Dick's enthusiasm and joy would be evident in all lectures, regardless of the subject.

It is impossible to enumerate the impact that Dick Root has had on the field of ecology and ecological education. Countless former students and their students and so on are being influenced by the model that he has laid out in which he encourages students to first observe in the field and from those observations commence further inquiry. His lab housed students involved in a wide range of ecological work, and therefore inculcated a curiosity and respect for ecology in the broadest possible terms.

It is with great pleasure that we award Dick Root with the 2004 Eugene P. Odum Award for Ecological Education.

Eugene P. Odum Award Subcommittee: Linda Wallace (Chair), Charlene D'Avanzo, Margaret Carreiro, Bruce Grant, Peter Feinsinger, and Kathy Winnett-Murray
