In Memoriam

Forest W. Stearns
1918-1999

Forest W. Stearns, Professor Emeritus of Biological Sciences died September 8, 1999 at Found Lake - Saint Germain, Wisconsin. Forest was a member of the UWM Faculty from 1968 until his retirement in 1987.

Forest was born in Shorewood, Wisconsin, where he completed his elementary education and graduated from Shorewood High School. He attended Harvard University and received the baccalaureate degree in 1939. That same year he entered the University of Wisconsin - Madison and began his graduate studies, receiving his Master's degree in Botany in 1940. He continued his graduate studies toward the Ph.D. until 1942 when he entered the military service. He served in the US Army Air Force from 1942-1946 and in the Air Force Reserve from 1946-1954. After returning from active service he resumed his Ph.D. studies completing them in 1947 under the direction of Professor John Curtis.

His academic career began at Purdue University where he taught Biology courses from 1947-1957. In 1957 he joined the United States Forest Service in Vicksburg, Mississippi and carried out research in wildlife ecology at the Southern Forest Experiment Station. He transferred to the North Central Forest Experiment Station working at both the St. Paul, Minnesota and Rhinelander, Wisconsin offices. In 1968, Forest accepted an offer to join the faculty at UWM.

At UWM Forest incorporated the urban mission of this University into his teaching and research. The term Urban Ecology became associated with his name, attracting many graduate students. He remained interested wildlife ecology and in the primary productivity of aquatic and upland ecosystems. The courses he taught required considerable field work. Forest believed the best way to learn about the natural environment was to be out in the system you were studying. He actively participated in many of the field studies of his graduate students, collecting soil samples and climatic data or marking out quadrat sections. He became known as "Papa Bear" because of his burly nature and his willingness to help with field work. Many of his students have gone on to become university faculty members, environmental educators, directors of botanical gardens or arboreta and natural resources personnel. His students thought so highly of Forest that upon his retirement from UWM they endowed an award in his name at the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters. Forest mentored 11 Ph.D. students in his tenure at UWM.
Forest's University service included serving as Chair of the Department of Botany from 1973 until 1977, Chair of the Landscape Advisory Sub-Committee, Chair of the Field Station Committee and as a member of the Downer Woods Committee and the Graduate School Research Committee.


Forest was also active in a number of state and local organizations. He helped to found The Friends of the Domes, being both an active and emeritus board member until his death. He served as chairman of the Wisconsin Scientific Area Preservation Council, Vice-President of the Midwest Section of the Wildlife Society, and held memberships in the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, The Wisconsin Chapter of The Nature Conservancy and the Botanical Club of Wisconsin.

In addition to his teaching and administrative duties, Forest was a prolific writer, authoring or co-authoring numerous papers, book chapters and environmental reports. He often spoke about his work at professional meetings. Forest remained active in his retirement years, continuing to write professional papers and speak on ecological issues.

He received many awards for his efforts including: the Outstanding Leadership Award of the American Institute of Biological Sciences; a Wisconsin Academy Citation from the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters; the Wisconsin Idea Award of the School of Natural Resources University of Wisconsin-Madison; the Scientific Roundtable Award from the United States Forest Service; a Certificate of Appreciation from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Forest is survived by his wife Ruth, daughters Carlin and Andrea, son Jay, a number of grandchildren, cousins and nephews. He was preceded in death by his son Timothy. The ecological community has lost a leader. Forest's students have lost a friend.

Peter J. Salamun
Thomas P. Schuck

Department of Biological Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201 USA