WALTER P. COTTAM, EMINENT ECOLOGIST

Dr. Walter P. Cottam

Dr. Walter P. Cottam has spent his life studying the mountains and deserts of the West. He was born in 1894 at St. George, a small desert community in southern Utah, and received his A.B. degree in 1916 and his M. A. in 1918 from Brigham Young University. The latter was one of the first two Master's degrees granted by that institution. His first job, that of a high-school science teacher, was obtained by making an 80-mile round trip by bicycle for an interview. He spent the summer of 1921 at the University of Wisconsin where he expected to continue his studies in the field of plant pathology. But on his way home he visited the University of Chicago, where he chanced to hear an inspiring lecture on ecology by Dr. Henry C. Cowles that firmly charted his future course of study. Through Cottam's persuasion Dr. Cowles was invited to spend the next summer on a joint educational venture between the University of Chicago and Brigham Young University in ecological field studies of the Intermountain West. The arrangement proved so successful that it was repeated by the Utah Agricultural College in 1923. Cottam received the Ph. D. from the University of Chicago in 1926 with a thesis on the **Ecology of the Flora of Utah Lake.**

Professor Cottam began his teaching career in 1918 as a science instructor at the Jordan High School of Utah. The following twelve years were spent in the Department of Botany at Brigham Young University, and at the close of the present school year he will have completed thirty years of teaching at the University of Utah. He served as department head at both of these institutions for sev-

Source: Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Dec., 1960), pp. 105-107. Courtesy of JSTOR

eral years. He was visiting professor of botany at the University of Chicago in the summer of 1930. In 1945 he served as botanist at the American University, U. S. Army, in Shrivenham, England, and as lecturer in botany, Division of Information and Education, Frankfurt, Germany in 1946.

Such are the bare essentials of his chronology. These indicate an active and busy life, but do not necessarily give the reasons for his selection as Eminent Ecologist. Those reasons lie beneath the surface data, but are nevertheless the most important parts of Dr. Cottam's life and his contributions to the science of ecology.

As with most eminent men in any field, Dr. Cottam's personality has been the most obvious force in shaping his career. He is an intensely vital man, interested in all things and with the ability to accomplish almost any task. Secondly, he has shown that he has the awareness and the temperament of a true artist in his field — intensely aware of the beauties of the deserts and the mountains of his land and capable of capturing that beauty in photography and in his writing. Thirdly, he is a man who is forthright both in conviction and in action — one who has made an indelible impression on the students who have worked under him and with him.

It is these characteristics which have made him a great teacher, for no one could participate in his classes without acquiring some of his enthusiasm about his subject or his feeling for the artistry of nature. In the Inter-mountain area of the West where much of the land is in public ownership, the presence among the voting public of many of his former students in ecology is an important force in the battle for enlightened land use and management. That he is, indeed, a good teacher seems to be further borne out by the fact that one of his five children is Dr. Grant Cottam, plant ecologist at the University of Wisconsin and a long-time member of this Society.

Dr. Cottam's research covers a variety of fields from descriptive vegetational studies to micro-climatic investigations and detailed quantiative research on the effect of grazing on forest and desert ranges. He has also done much in showing the inter-relationship between taxonomy, ecology, and plant geography, with his most recent work on aspen ecotypes and hybrid oaks with all their ecological implications.

The classic essay — originally delivered as a F. W. Reynolds Memorial lecture in 1947 — "Is Utah Sahara bound?" was preceded by a modest but continuous supply of papers that continues to the present day. His published works number an estimated thirty or more, the exact number not being easily determined. His most recent contribution, of which the speaker is aware, appeared in **Ecology** in 1959 — "Some clues to Great Basin postpluvial climates provided by oak distributions". He is currently immersed in a major research undertaking under a National Science Foundation grant in his beloved Great Basin.

One cannot describe eminence. It is an elusive thing, based on a wide range of activities, but more than this, on the man himself. Walter Cottam is a man of quiet generosity who has given widely to

many people of his intellect, his strength, and his vitality. The Ecological Society is proud to record him as the one designated, Eminent Ecologist in the year of our Lord, 1960.

August, 1960

John F. Reed
William B. Drew
Thomas Park, Chm.,
Nominating Committee

Ecological Publication of Walter P. Cottam

1. (With George Stewart) Plant succession as a result of grazing and meadow desiccation by erosion since settlement in 1862. Jour. Forestry 38:613-626. 1940.
2. (With George Stewart and Selar Hutchins) Influence of unrestricted grazing on northern salt desert plant associations in western Utah. Jour. Agric. Research 60:289-364. 1940.
3. (With Frederick Evans) A comparative study of the vegetation of grazed and ungrazed canyons of the Wasatch Range, Utah. Ecol. 26(2): 171-181. 1945.
4. Resource problems of Utah. Proc. Utah Acad. Sci. Arts and Letters: 22:53-64. 1945.
5. Is Utah Sahara bound? Eleventh Annual Frederick William Reynolds Lecture Bull. University of Utah Vol. 37 38pp. 1947.
6. The role of Ecology in the conservation of renewable resources. Proc. Inter-American Conference of Renewable Resources. Denver, Colorado. U. S. Dept. State pp. 396-401. 1948.
7. The western range and changing human economy. Editorial in Jour. Range Management. 4(1):1-4. 1951.
8. Prevernal leafing of aspen in Utah mountains. Jour. Arnold Arb. 35: 239-248. 1954.
9. (With John Tucker and Rudy Drobnick) Some clues to Great Basin post-pluvial climates provided by oak distributions. Ecol. 40(3): 361-377. 1959.