

EMINENT ECOLOGIST AWARD



Richard B. Root

The Eminent Ecologist Award is given in recognition of an outstanding body of ecological work or of sustained contributions of extraordinary merit. It is the highest honor bestowed by the Ecological Society of America. The winner of the 2003 Eminent Ecologist Award is Dr. Richard B. Root, Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at Cornell University. During his nearly 40-year tenure at Cornell, Dr. Root has contributed to the field of ecology in numerous ways. Few ecologists have so effectively spanned population and community ecology, and also managed to effectively blend research in

fundamental areas of ecology and evolutionary biology into the application to agricultural systems. His colleagues view him as a “true scholar” with a gift for blending his love for natural history patterns into current and emerging issues in both theoretical and applied ecology.

Dick Root’s career began with a focus on niche partitioning in gnatcatchers, a study that formed the basis for his development of the “guild concept.” This paper (published in *Ecological Monographs* in 1967) is a “citation classic,” and the concept is a contribution that remains a cornerstone of how we view ecology today. His research expanded over the next decade to include insect communities, and through this he developed an interest in agricultural systems. Over his career, Dr. Root has published a wealth of influential papers that have merged his interests in theoretical and empirical studies of community ecology. Most notable among these was his work on the resource concentration hypothesis, the evolutionary aspects of defensive chemistry, and community assembly theory. His work in agricultural systems is particularly noteworthy, as he was among the first to demonstrate that these systems are important and interesting “ecological communities” in their own right, and can serve as analogs for the interactions and processes that occur in natural systems, such as successional old fields.

Dr. Root’s influence on the field of ecology has extended beyond his research to his role as an advisor, mentor, and teacher. To date he has had 37 Ph.D and 6 M.S. students, many of whom have had significant impacts on the field of ecology, including Paulette Bierzychudek, Naomi Cappuccino, Walter Carson, Steve Chaplin, W. J. Cromartie, Ted Evans, Peter Feinsinger, Fritz Grevstad, Ann Herzig, Ruth Hufbauer, Tamaru Hunt, Peter Kareiva, Sharon Kinsman, Carol Loeffler, David Maddox, Peter McEvoy, Frank Messina, Gretchen Meyer, Matt Parker, Dan Peck, Merrill Peterson, Peter Price, Carol Pearson, Ralph, Bev Rathke, Jan Salick, Sarah Sargent, Jorma Tahvanainen, Maria Uriarte, and Andrew G. Zink.

Many others who were not his students have also published with him and consider him to be their mentor. He has also served the ESA in numerous roles, including a term as president, membership on several strategic and planning committees, and as a member of the editorial boards of all three major ESA journals. His larger impact on the ESA, however, may be through the number of former students (graduate and undergraduate) who now are active in the Society.

Dick Root is clearly an individual who has influenced the field of ecology through his own research and through mentorship of others, and the ESA is pleased to honor him as the 2003 Eminent Ecologist Award recipient in recognition of these contributions.

Eminent Ecologist Award Subcommittee: Katherine L. Gross (Chair), Paul Dayton, Peter Groffman, Nelson Hairston, Jr., Robert Holt, and Beatrice VanHorne.