

Resolution of Respect

Professor Dennis Parkinson

1927–2009

Professor Dennis Parkinson, who was an internationally recognized soil microbiologist and ecologist, passed away in December, 2009, aged 82. Dennis was born in September 1927, and after his secondary education at Bolton School in Lancashire, England, he did National Service in the British Army as a paratrooper from 1947 to 1948. Dennis then attended King's College, the University of London, to read for his B.Sc. (Hons.) in Botany from 1948 to 1951. His graduate research for a Ph.D. in Soil Microbiology was at the University of Nottingham in 1951–1953. He then served as an Assistant Lecturer at the Royal Holloway College of London from 1953 to 1956. He was appointed as a Lecturer in Soil Microbiology at the University of Liverpool in 1956 and served there until 1964, when he emigrated to Canada to take up a post as Professor at the University of Waterloo from 1964 to 1967, acting as Dean of Science, 1966–1967. In 1967, he moved to the University of Calgary, where he remained until he passed away on 29 December 2009.



In 1978, for his sabbatical, he stayed in Germany in the laboratory of Klaus Domsch in Braunschweig. During his long tenure at Calgary he served as Head of the Department of Biological Sciences from 1968 to 1983, and from 1983 to 1989 he acted as Director of the Kananaskis Centre for Environmental Research.

Dennis retired from the University of Calgary on 1 July 1994, and he was appointed Faculty Professor from 1994 to 2007, a sign of the high esteem in which he was held by his many colleagues at the University of Calgary. He still had an active research laboratory up to the time of his death. Dennis had a long-standing interest in international soil science and soil ecology and attended nearly all of the International Soil Zoology Colloquia meetings from 1962 on, making many close friendships with soil zoologists and microbiologists, which influenced his research in the latter part of his career. Dennis was a leading proponent of synthesis efforts in decomposition and soil ecology in the International Biological Programme. Foremost among his mentoring efforts in that area was the issue of *Oikos* 39(3):287–388, 1982, featuring “A comparative analysis of soil fauna populations and their role in decomposition processes,” edited by Henning Petersen and Malcolm Luxton. Later in a number of reviews he summarized the state of the art in soil fungal ecology and in soil microbial–animal interactions. One of Dennis’s

most dedicated linkages was with the University of Kelaniya in Sri Lanka, which he visited annually from 1982 on; his last visit was in May 2009, not long before he became ill.

Dennis was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1983, and a Centennial Fellow of the British Mycological Society in 1996. He received a Distinguished Biologist Award from the Canadian Council of University Biology Chairs in 1999. He was given the U.S. Soil Ecology Society Professional Achievement Award in 2001.

His research in soil microbiology covered a broad range of topics, including the effects of burning and pollution on the microbiology of forest soil, studies on fungal ecology in the plant rhizosphere, and on processes of decomposition of forest litter. In later years he, and his colleagues and students, focused increasingly on interactions between soil microorganisms and soil-inhabiting invertebrates. He was excited at the discovery of the arrival of European earthworms in Canadian Rocky Mountain forests in the late 1980s, which he had investigated 20 years before. He saw the process as a chance to dig into the changes associated with the invasion process. Following his integrative view of the functioning of ecosystems, he saw both the beneficial and detrimental changes, and followed them with the eyes of an ecologist, being fascinated at how single species can transform ecological systems. Many will remember his presentations on this and other subjects, filled with excitement and his unique sense of humor.

Dennis supervised the research of 42 Ph.D. students and 17 M.Sc. students, many of whom now populate universities across Canada. He attracted several postdocs to come to Calgary who later took up faculty positions in several countries of the world. Dennis is remembered as a generous mentor who was considerate, personable, and supportive of his junior colleagues. He loved to socialize with his colleagues and graduate students, and these social interactions were invariably fueled by his purchase of generous amounts of beer to aid in the cogitation processes! At these unforgettable moments he smoked his pipe in his very personal way, and enjoyed talking about anything, including the current state of the football leagues in the UK and other places of the world. It was a special pleasure, at these events, to follow his distinguished skill in playing with the meaning and origin of words and language in general.

Dennis was the co-author of a book, *The Ecology of Soil Fungi* (1960), and more than 200 peer-reviewed scientific papers. He served on many national and international committees and from 1992 to 1997 he was the Chairman of Sub-Commission D in Soil Zoology of the International Society of Soil Science.

Professor Dennis Parkinson had an outstanding scientific career, which left an indelible mark on soil microbiological research in many laboratories all over the world. His unique way of combining scientific and personal life, enjoying both deeply and never losing his sense of humor, will remain unforgettable. He will be missed sorely by his many friends, colleagues, and former students, and he leaves a gap that will be extremely difficult to fill. We lost one of our scientific heroes, and a beloved friend. Dennis is survived by his wife, Valerie Snowdon, his daughter Louise, and two sons, David and Nicholas.

David Coleman (Athens), Clive Edwards (Ohio), and Stefan Scheu (Göttingen)