DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
MARSIIALL R. WHEELER

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Marshall R. Wheeler, professor emeritus, integrative biology, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger
Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
MARSIIALL R. WHEELER

Dr. Marshall R. Wheeler, emeritus professor of zoology, University of Texas at Austin, was born April 7, 1917, in Carlinville, Illinois, and died January 3, 2010, in Austin, Texas. He was the son of Ralph and Hester Ward Wheeler. He attended Blackburn College and later received a B.A. degree cum laude at Baylor University. He was a graduate student and teaching assistant with a biology major and entomology minor at Texas A&M University. He transferred to The University of Texas at Austin to working toward a doctoral degree.

During World War II, Wheeler joined the U.S. Navy and served in the Pacific Theater as a medical laboratory technician with a specialty in parasitology. He was chief pharmacist’s mate when he returned to the U.S. mainland. During a short leave of absence, he married Edna Cronquist, a graduate student in botany at UT. After returning to duty, he taught parasitology (malaria) at the School of Tropical Medicine at Treasure Island, California. He was commissioned an ensign and sent to Florida as a control officer in mosquito at the Boca Chica Naval Air Station. Near the end of WWII, he retired from the navy with the rank of lieutenant (j.g.). After the war, he re-entered The University of Texas, and in 1947 was awarded a Ph.D. degree in zoology (genetics). At the invitation of Professors Patterson and Stone, Wheeler stayed on in the UT Austin zoology department initially as instructor, and later achieving rank of Professor, from which retired in 1977.

Wheeler was a key member of UT Austin’s world-renown Drosophila, evolution and genetics group that dominated the zoology department for several decades. His vital role was as the world’s leading taxonomist of the genus Drosophila and more generally the family Drosophilidae. He authored or co-authored over 100 scientific articles in which he named and described more than 250 new species of Drosophila and related genera. His work was vital to research projects by colleagues involving diverse species Drosophila spp. For example, he worked with Wilson Stone in the Marshall Islands to determine the genetic effects of radiation on natural populations. Wheeler also organized the “National Drosophila Species Resource Center” at The University of Texas that maintained about 300 different species in live culture. These were kept for use by researchers at UT and shared freely around the world. This facility was supported by grants from The National Science Foundation, The National Institutes of Health, The Atomic Energy Commission, and others. Some living cultures from Wheeler’s efforts are still maintained in laboratories by Drosophila research groups around the U.S.

Wheeler and others collected thousands of drosophilid specimens in the U.S. and Central and South America, Japan and Pacific Islands that now are maintained in the National Museum of Natural History, Washington, D.C., and the American Museum of Natural History, New York City. Eight new Drosophila species, including one fossil, have been named “Wheeleri” in his honor by other taxonomists of the group. His work on the Hawaiian Drosophila, in particular, set the stage for one of the best model systems for the study of diversification and speciation, the study of which was still accelerating at the time of Wheeler’s death.
Marshall Wheeler enjoyed teaching and received numerous teaching awards during his tenure at UT. A former UT undergraduate, now a physician in Austin said of Wheeler’s class: “I had Dr. Wheeler for basic genetics in 1974 or 1975. First I felt that with his work with Drosophila he was a perfect person to teach genetics, and bringing in examples from his past research really brought genetics to life. He wasn’t a flashy teacher but his complete understanding of the subject matter and confidence were inspiring---- He was just a Class Act in my opinion.”

Wheeler served as president of the Southwestern Association of Naturalists and of the Southwestern Entomological Society. He was an editor of the *Annals of the Entomological Society of America*, and also of a series, *Studies in Genetics*, published by the Genetics Foundation of The University of Texas. He was a member of The Wilderness Society, the Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society, and other organizations. He held the belief that all efforts to preserve our natural world were worth supporting. After his retirement he pursued his hobby-- growing and hybridizing daylilies-- and was passionately in pursuit of the elusive blue daylily.


This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Lawrence Gilbert (chair) and Dick Richardson.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Natural Sciences, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on December 21, 2010. This resolution is posted under “Memorials” at:
http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.