

Edward Coulton Becker (1923-2008)

Dr. Ed Becker passed away on May 13, 2008 at the age of 85. He was a research scientist at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada from 1952-1980, working as a taxonomist at the Canadian National Collection (CNC) of Insects, Arachnids and Nematodes in Ottawa. His area of expertise was the systematics of click beetles (Coleoptera: Elateridae), which include many Canadian crop pest species. During his life, he published 36 scientific articles, book chapters and reviews (see list of publications). Following retirement, he became an honorary research associate at the CNC and continued to come into work nearly every day for the past 28 years.



Ed was born on March 15, 1923 in St. Louis, Missouri to Coulton and Grace Becker and was the first of six children, and a twin. He spent his early years on the family farm near Williamsville MO. After high school, he attended the University of Missouri where he took three years of agricultural studies before joining the US Marine Corps. The war ended just as he was being shipped to Japan, but he was able to visit that country and saw the devastation the atom bomb had on Nagasaki.

After the war, Ed met Martha Mae Elliott at a church camp at Lake of the Ozarks and they were married in 1948. The newly married couple soon moved to Honduras, where Ed worked as an entomologist for the Standard Fruit Co. They returned and Ed attended the University of Illinois, earning his PhD in entomology in 1952 with a thesis on the taxonomy of *Agriotes* (Coleoptera: Elateridae). By good fortune, Agriculture Canada was looking for a taxonomist to work on click beetles at the CNC and he and Martha soon moved to Ottawa.

Among his 36 systematics publications are monographic revisions of the large and economically important click beetle genera *Agriotes* and *Athous* (Coleoptera: Elateridae) of North America. This work was central to controlling a major North American crop pest problem. Together, his work has been world-wide in scope, spans several beetle families, and includes descriptions of 53 new species and two new genera. Towards the end of his research career, Ed co-authored a series of major scientific articles with the Japanese scientist Hitoo Ôhira. Becker's systematic research was innovative, in that he wrote the most rigorous, detailed descriptions and keys for Elateridae to date and pioneered new unexplored morphological character systems.

In addition to Ed's research, he was active in many entomological societies and organizations, working as treasurer of the Entomological Society of Canada (1961-1985), Section A representative and governing board member of the Entomological Society of America (1982-1984), Editor of *The Coleopterists Bulletin* (1983-1990) and President of the Coleopterists Society (1971-1972). Perhaps his biggest contribution to entomology was through the CanaColl Foundation, a non-profit organization that Ed helped create and almost single-handedly nurtured for the past 36 years. The foundation promotes taxonomic research at the CNC by providing funds to visiting entomologists who curate the collection. The foundation currently has investments of \$475,000 and has awarded over \$200,000 in grants to nearly 300 researchers. In addition, Ed wrote and distributed a quarterly newsletter for retired entomologists and their spouses for the past 18 years. For many years, he also visited public school classrooms to promote entomology, often with a tarantula named Carmen at his side. Ed was recognized for his work by receiving the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal (1978), the Canada Commemorative Award (1984) and was made a Fellow of the Entomological Society of Canada (1974) and an Honorary Member of the Entomological Society of America (1997), at one

time, the only person to be so honoured by both societies. His tireless efforts to promote entomology and the CNC have had far-reaching effects not only in Canada, but throughout the world. He was very well known in the entomological community, partly because of his friendly, social nature, but also because he attended every single ESC meeting for the past 49 years! Outside of entomology, Ed was a devoted family man who helped raise five daughters and was married for nearly 60 years. He was a Scout leader and was also deeply involved with his church, Rideau Park United, where he held numerous positions.

Ed enjoyed good health until quite recently, but in the last two months, he developed severe congestive heart disease. He died in Ottawa surrounded by family and is survived by his wife Martha and daughters Barbara, Marcia, Debra, Lynda and Patricia and three grandchildren. Ed's cheerful, positive attitude, sense of humour and love of bowties will be sadly missed.

Donations in Ed's memory can be made to the CanaColl Foundation, c/o Andy Bennett, 960 Carling Ave., Ottawa, ON, K1A 0C6.

- Andy Bennett
Secretary and Treasurer of the CanaColl Foundation