

The Entomology Society of Manitoba has lost a longtime member with the passing of Bill Preston at St. Boniface Hospital on 11 October 2013; he was 76. Bill grew up happily exploring the desert, grassland and forests of the Okanagan Valley, where he developed his love of nature and of rattlesnakes in particular. After graduating from the University of British Columbia with BSc and MSc degrees in wildlife management, Bill married Willetta, and the couple moved to Norman, Oklahoma, where he completed his PhD in Zoology, studying water snakes. He also spent many pleasurable days collecting and studying the rich insect fauna of the region. While living there, they were able to explore many parts of the southern United States, Mexico and St. Lucia.

Returning to Canada in 1969, he accepted the position of Curator of Reptiles, Amphibians and Fishes at the newly opened Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature in Winnipeg. During his 28 years with the Museum, he enjoyed numerous opportunities to explore the province and to travel to other countries. He was a man with a wide range of interests about the natural world, and became a passionate entomologist, amassing an extensive insect collection for the Museum and his own personal collection. The study of butterflies, tiger beetles, spiders and ants drew his attention, and he had plans to publish a number of papers on these subjects. Bill was always generous with his time and expertise, and often helped friends and students with troublesome identifications for the species he knew best. He will likely be notably remembered for his book on *"The Reptiles and Amphibians of Manitoba"* - part of the provincial fauna that had received little previous attention. He also co-authored *"The Butterflies of Manitoba"* and contributed articles to *"The Encyclopedia of Manitoba."*

Bill loved field work and was elated to discover the first Manitoba records of the Great Plains Toad and a species of ant. He walked frequently down to the Red River behind the Museum during his lunch hours, and faithfully recorded notes on the appearance and habits of butterflies. He never lost his "little boy" excitement about learning new things regarding the natural world, and he just had to discuss these observations with his Museum colleagues. In fact, it was impossible to walk past the open door of his office without being invited in for a lengthy conversation. Bill was also notorious for his quirky sense of humour, and often he could barely complete a joke without losing his voice as he broke out in laughter. He loved showing youngsters the many critters in his laboratory, ranging from a Hognose Snake to a giant, one-eyed Snapping Turtle that he rescued from the Assiniboine River. Bill was an active participant in the ESM Youth Encouragement and Public Education Committee, when it was revamped under the presidency of Ron Sinha in 1973. The group organized numerous field trips and workshops in the ensuing years, to LaBarrière Park, Sandilands Provincial Forest, and to the newly developing outdoor education facility at Fort Whyte. Bill was always keen to go out on these adventures, and he loved to share his knowledge and experience with all the keen young entomologists. For a number of consecutive years, the Youth Encouragement Committee conducted a week-long display on insects at Polo Park Shopping Mall, and later at the newly opened St. Vital Mall. There were all



Willetta Preston

**William Burton Preston  
(1937-2013)  
One of a kind**

manners of insects, alive and dead on offer to the public. Bill was the only person who always attended all day every day of the exhibit. He loved to talk about insects, and there was hardly a better opportunity for non-stop conversation than at the entomology display. He could never understand the concern of the Polo Park manager when someone had laid a drinking straw to breach the petroleum jelly barrier that was meant to contain the thatching ant colony. Many of the ants had gone walkabout in the night and were found by disgruntled shop keepers the next morning. Bill just couldn't see the problem; to him they were harmless ants.

Bill was also interested in photography, astronomy, geology, theatre and electronics, and recently built himself a computer. He belonged to a number of associations including the Entomological Society of Canada, Entomological Society of Manitoba, Manitoba Naturalists Society, Winnipeg Amateur Movie Makers, and the Manitoba Rock and Mineral Society. He served in various capacities within these groups for which he received several awards. He was a member of several government committees such as the Endangered Species Advisory Committee, and attended meetings regarding the snake pits at Narcisse. Bill had the well-earned respect from his many friends and colleagues, due to his broad knowledge, developed over his long career at the Museum.

In later years, Bill's health deteriorated to the point where he could no longer participate in field activities, but with the loving support of Willetta, he maintained a positive attitude about life and his passion for nature to the end of his days. Bill cared deeply about educating the public about the need to conserve biodiversity. He will be missed by many people, and his legacy lives on through his books, exhibits, and collections.

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