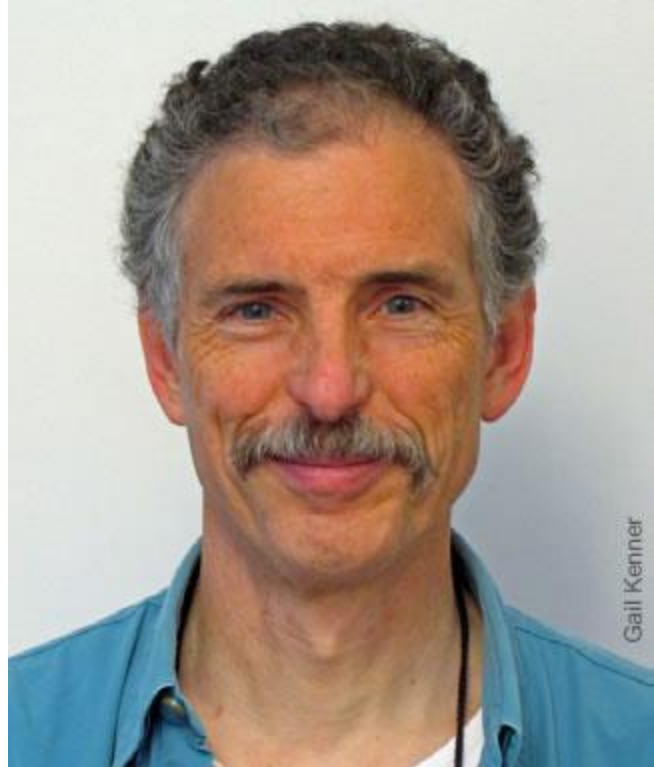


Rex Kenner (1950-2010)

Rex Donal Kenner, PhD – entomologist, vertebrate zoologist, chemist, teacher, conservationist – died of an aortic aneurysm in Vancouver, on 23 January 2010. He was 59 years old.

Rex was born on 14 November 1950 in Chicago, but grew up in Natchitoches, Louisiana, where his family had moved when he was 9 months old. In 1971 he received a BS degree from Northwestern State University, Louisiana, and in 1976 earned his doctorate in physical chemistry from Michigan State University. Rex first came to Vancouver as a post-doctoral fellow in the Chemistry Department at the University of British Columbia (1977-1980) and remained there until 1983 as a research associate. He met his future wife, Gail, in 1978 in Vancouver and they married there in 1980. From 1983 to 1988 Rex was a research chemist at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum in Bochum,



Germany, and between 1990 and 1993 was a Senior Research Scientist in the Division of Applied Physics, CSIRO, Sydney, Australia. He and Gail then returned to Vancouver, where Rex focused his life on biology and the natural history of the region. As a boy, Rex had collected insects until he started university; this interest was reawakened when he began watching dragonflies during a Vancouver Natural History Society outing in 1994.

Although Rex had an academic science background, he was a self-taught entomologist and vertebrate biologist who spent much of his time studying insects and teaching others about them. His favourite insects were the aquatic groups, and he concentrated on the taxonomy and distribution of dragonflies, water bugs and beetles. Rex was a strong supporter of the Entomological Society of British Columbia, presented papers at its meetings, and published often in the *Journal* and in *Boreus*. Periodically, he also undertook contracts associated with aquatic entomology, such as ecological impact studies; he was an associate of Robertson Environmental Services in Langley, British Columbia.

Most of Rex's recent publications were on the Haliplidae (crawling water beetles). He had unearthed an undescribed genus of halipid beetle from China (he announced the find at the 2006 ESBC annual meeting) and was preparing the description with Rob Roughley, water beetle expert at the University of Manitoba. In the meantime, Rex found another new haliplid species and, when Rob suddenly died of a stroke in November 2009 (see *Bulletin of ESC42*[1], 2010), Rex decided to name it after him. But now, with Rex's death 2 months later, these unfinished papers are sad reminders of our double loss – two of Canada's water beetle experts suddenly gone in their prime. When he died, Rex was also studying, with several co-authors, the bird lice of BC. Some of the material was amassed long ago by George Spencer; some was collected by Rex himself. He was excited about the project, not only for its scientific value, but because it closely connected two of his great loves – insects and birds.

Since 1995, Rex volunteered up to 5 days a week in the Spencer Entomological Collection at the University of British Columbia. There, his accomplishments included labeling and sorting the 15 000 Diptera specimens of the Foxlee Collection, reorganizing and databasing the Odonata collection, and identifying and curating several families of aquatic beetles. In addition, as part of various research projects, he identified, curated and databased material from many other collections, including the Royal British Columbia Museum (Victoria), Strickland Museum (University of Alberta), Oregon State Arthropod Collection (Oregon State University), Essig Museum (University of California, Berkeley), California Academy of Sciences (San Francisco), Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto), J. B. Wallis Museum (University of Manitoba), Monte L. Bean Life Science Museum (Brigham Young University) and the James Entomological Museum (Washington State University). He regularly donated aquatic insect specimens to the Spencer Collection and to the Royal British Columbia Museum. In recognition of his superb volunteer work, Rex was appointed honorary Assistant Curator of the Spencer Entomology Collection. The ESBC nominated Rex for the national Norman Criddle Award, presented by the Entomological Society of Canada for extraordinary contributions to entomology by an amateur. Rex received the award in Kelowna in November 2003.

Since 2001, Rex's main work was as Curator of the Cowan Vertebrate Museum at the University of British Columbia; he had volunteered in that collection since 1993. Although the position was part-time until recently, Rex kept the collection going during the lean years, largely singlehandedly, putting in far more time than he was paid for. He organized and taught a keen group of volunteers to help with specimen preparation. His keen interest in both public education and the long-term health of the collections made him invaluable when the idea of a public biological museum began to take form at the university. Rex served on the steering committee planning the Beaty Biodiversity Museum, and played a forceful and vital role in its creation and development, including the daunting task of moving the entire collection to its new location.

Education was a huge part of Rex's life. He was a natural teacher. His enthusiasm and patience made him particularly effective with children, but he was loved by naturalists of all ages across the Vancouver region for his energetic, innovative education programs. His knowledge was wideranging. He could explain complex things in simple terms so that everyone understood, yet he maintained the highest scientific standards. Public awareness and appreciation of insects were significant activities. After developing a slide talk on dragonflies, Rex presented it to dozens of audiences, from natural history societies to seniors' groups, from wetland institutes to cultural societies. Newsletters and workshops are full of his programs on dragonflies and the importance of wetlands and aquatic life. Rex led many marsh and dragonfly programs for the Vancouver Natural History Society (now Nature Vancouver) and its Young Naturalists' Club. He published often in the Society's journal *Discovery*. In 2001, in recognition of his exceptional service, the VNHS presented Rex with its Garibaldi Award.

Rex was an instructor at Science World's summer Science Camp for teachers and was active in the Richmond Nature Park, Friends of Boundary Bay, Stanley Park Ecology Society and many other educational and conservation groups. Initially through his passion for birds, but also later through his natural history teaching, Rex was involved with the Taiwanese-Canadian Intercultural Green Club and became a prominent liaison between Taiwanese and Canadian naturalists.

Rex was a keen and committed conservationist. When an extensive environmental survey of Burns Bog was undertaken as part of the effort to preserve this extraordinary habitat, Rex was a major player in the aquatic insect component of the study. This not only involved surveys, but specimen identification, report writing and public presentations. He also helped organize aquatic insect surveys of the Terra Nova Natural Area in Richmond and Lulu Island Bog. The latter includes the Richmond Nature Park and adjacent National Defense lands, and the survey was part of a study directed at preserving the DND lands from development. In 1996 and 1997 Rex surveyed Odonata for the BC Conservation Data Centre and the Royal British Columbia Museum in the Lower Mainland and Peace River region, respectively.

Rex Kenner was a kind, intelligent and committed man, generous of his time and knowledge. He loved the details of the world and he loved sharing them. He and his wife Gail lived modestly but well, committed to an unpretentious and positive view of life. Rex was green before green was cool; didn't drive a car, didn't own a home, didn't need a lot of stuff. He stepped lightly on the earth. We are all better for having known him.

Rob Cannings, Curator of Entomology,
Royal British Columbia Museum

(with thanks to Gail Kenner, Karen Needham, Christine Adkins, Jennifer Heron, John Swann, Chris Majka, Dave Larson, Robb Bennett, Daphne Solecki, Eva Nagy, Catherine Stewart, Joseph Lin, Sampath Seneviratne, Dolph Schluter, Darren Irwin and Dick Cannings)