

## **R. John and Connie Taylor**

### **Oklahoma Scientists of the Year**

This year the Scientist of the Year Award is a scientist-scientist award to Connie and John Taylor, a married team of biologists. John and Connie met at an herbarium at the University of Oklahoma in the spring of 1959 in Dr. Penfound's plant ecology class; they were married August 8, 1959. What attracts biologists to each other? Connie says it was his light blue eyes; John says it was her energy and intelligence; in any case, they studied plants together.

Both have Oklahoma roots - all four of their parents are native Okies. R(aymond) John was born at Ada, and grew up at Troy near 10 Acre Rock. He attended East Central State University, receiving a B.S.Ed. in 1954 with a major in botany and zoology. He taught high school in Pauls Valley (1955-56) and Oklahoma City (1956-61). In 1958 he put a canoe in the Canadian River near Asher, and traveled by himself to the Red River, then to the Mississippi, ending in New Orleans after about a month. Afterward, he returned to Oklahoma and enrolled at OU. He earned a M.N.S. 1961 in botany, zoology, and education. He was an assistant professor at Southeastern Oklahoma State University (1961-63) before returning to OU where he received his Ph.D. in 1967 majoring in botany and zoology. His career continued at SEOSU where he is now Professor Emeritus of biology.

Connie was born in Washington, D.C., and admits to being a military brat. She attended 14 schools before graduating from Ardmore High. Her college education spanned almost 20 years; she was continually rejuvenated. In 1959 she received a B.S. in botany from the University of Oklahoma after working in the Mathematics Department (observatory) (1956-57), and the Botany Department (herbarium) (1957-59). The Bebb Herbarium of the Oklahoma Biological Survey was her employer during her master's study. She earned a M.S. in plant ecology in 1961. Connie joined the Biology Department at SEOSU in 1970. She received the Ph.D. in plant taxonomy from the University of Oklahoma in 1975.

Connie is a member of the following professional organizations: American Society of Plant Taxonomists, American Association of University Women (twice President of Durant chapter and on the National Fellowship Selection Committee), Oklahoma Ornithological Society (life member and served as President 1977-79), Oklahoma Academy of Science (Endangered Species Committee Chair, field trip leader, Collegiate Research Committee, SEOSU representative 1970-present, Biology Section Chair, and President-Elect), Audubon Society, Nature Conservancy, Sierra Club (several times an expert witness at Congressional hearings), National Wildlife Federation, Oklahoma Garden Club (life member), Oklahoma Flora, Inc. (Board of Directors), and Oklahoma Native Plant Society (President 1993). She has served on NIH committees. Her community activities include talks to women's and civic groups, service in the Methodist Church (UMWS President, district officer, lay leader, Wesley Foundation, and Fidelis Sunday School teacher), and Texoma Needle Arts, Embroiders Guild of America. Connie's vita lists 52 publications and presentations.

Professional organizations to which John belongs include: Torrey Botanical Club, American Fern Society, American Society of Plant Taxonomists, Southern Appalachia Botanical Club, California Botanical Society, Southwestern Association of Naturalists, Texas Organization of Endangered Species, Oklahoma Ornithological Society, and Oklahoma Academy of Science (Chair of Biology Section 1979). John has 64 publications.



John and Connie Taylor receiving OSY plaques from Jack Tyler (center), OAS president.

Both Connie and John have made substantial contributions to science education in Oklahoma and have made major contributions to the cumulative knowledge of biodiversity in the state. The 1989 Oklahoma Botanical Literature review by F. L. Johnson and T. H. Milby credits them with 36 descriptions: 3 by Connie, 10 by John, and 23 together. Their book *An Annotated List of Ferns, Fern Allies, Gymnosperms, and Flowering Plants of Oklahoma*, lists more than 2800 species. A second edition was published in 1991. The book lists all Oklahoma species of plants by common and scientific name and indicates whether the species is native or introduced. It contains 312 species new to Oklahoma since the publication of Waterfall's guide in 1969. About one half of these new species were added as a result of the Taylors' observations.

Field work has been important to John. He participated in an ecological survey of the interior of Alaska, served as botanist for mammal survey of Zacatecas, Mexico, made several trips to Costa Rica, participated in the biological surveys of the Glover River, the Yukon, McGee Creek, Lake Worth, southeastern Alaska, and western Canada, made trips with students to Mexico, Florida, Texas, and Colorado, and visited New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming on working vacations.

Connie has been honored as the Durant Business and Professional Women's Club Woman of the Year, 1986. In 1990 she received the Burlington Northern Award for teaching excellence. Connie and John jointly received the 1975 Educator of the Year award from the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation organization.

For a field biologist the sure way to immortality is to have a species named for you. A Costa Rican fern is named *Elaphoglossum taylorianum*; an "indian-paint-brush" is named *Castilleja tayloriorum*.

Connie's specific areas of research include: goldenrods (*Solidago*); *Euthamia* (the only authority on the genus in the U.S. and Canada), revision of the list of vascular plants of Oklahoma (3rd edition); a pronouncing guide to Oklahoma genera; and key to the families of Oklahoma plants and to Asteraceae.

In 1969 John established the SEOSU Herbarium, which was originally composed of the private collections of John, Connie, Dr. Don Hazell, and Dr. James Lester. At present there are over 80,000 sheets of plants on deposit. The Herbarium is internationally known, being listed in Index Herbariorum I and II, and in 1974 was selected as one of the 105 herbaria to be designated National Resource Collections. While some of the specimens added to the collection since 1969 have come from students, the majority of them were collected by the Taylors. They spend their "vacations" collecting plants. John set out to re-collect every species known to grow in Oklahoma; several species were found in the seeps and bogs of southeastern Oklahoma that do not occur elsewhere in the state.

The arguably-best herbarium research library in the state, containing several thousand volumes, was assembled by John to supplement the plant collection. In the tradition of scholars, John used mostly personal funds to establish and maintain the library. Scientists pursuing their research with a consuming passion and investing their personal funds in addition to their time are rare these days. The SEOSU Herbarium is a state research treasure brought to life by the Taylors.

From reading this (partial) list of accomplishments and contributions, it is easy to see why John and Connie were selected as the 1993 Oklahoma Scientists of the Year. The Taylors are a testament to what can be accomplished when scientific curiosity and love are combined to make a professional collaboration and marriage. They admit to some professional disagreements while producing their book, but these were obviously resolved.

John and Connie's biological experimentation together culminated in the production of three children. Kathy (Kathryn Elaine) Taylor, B.S. in Architecture from OU, is a mall architect in Fort Worth, TX. Brian William Taylor has a M.S. in Physics from OU. He works for the Department of Physics and Astronomy at the University of Northern Arizona and is responsible for the National Undergraduate Research Observatory located south of Flagstaff. Kim (Kimberly Ann) Taylor Smith has a degree from Texas Woman's University in Denton. She teaches art at two elementary schools in Corpus Christi, TX and is the mother of the Taylor's two grandchildren.