



## IN MEMORIAM

## WILLIS WAGNER WIRTH

Willis Wagner "Bill" Wirth, renowned biting midge specialist, died on 3 September 1994 in Gainesville, FL. Wirth was born 17 October 1916 on a farm near Dunbar, NE. He majored in biology at Peru (Nebraska) State Teachers College (1933--1938). He received a B.S. degree in zoology and entomology from Iowa State University in 1940, an M.S. in entomology from Louisiana State University in 1947, and a Ph.D. in systematic entomology from the University of California at Berkeley in 1950.

During World War II, Wirth served as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Public Health Service. He was assigned to malaria control in Louisiana and to quarantine service in Miami and Honolulu. While in Honolulu, his survey work revealed that the oriental fruit fly and other insects from Asia and the western Pacific had become established in Hawaii.

From 1947 to 1949, he was a teaching assistant in insect systematics and forest entomology at the University of California at Berkeley. During the summers of 1947 and 1948, Wirth worked on mosquito surveys for the California Department of Health, with special reference to encephalitis virus isolations.

From 1949 to 1983, Wirth was a research entomologist for USDA-ARS at the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, DC. Wirth's research assignments included taxonomic studies on Diptera, particularly the biting midges of the family Ceratopogonidae. He received several USDA citations for superior work performance. In 1956, he was a Fulbright Research Scholar at the School of Public Health, University of Sydney, Australia, working on the biology and taxonomy of Australian biting midges. He also served in many special assignments

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while employed by USDA. These assignments included work at the University of Florida in 1951 (to study biting midges), the U.S. Livestock Insects Research Laboratory (Kerrville, TX) in 1953 and 1955, various European museums (to study type collections of early taxonomists) in 1957, the New York State Museum in 1961, a Smithsonian-Archbold-Bredin Biological survey of Dominica in 1965, Panama (to study the breeding places of Neotropical biting midges) in 1967, and Great Plains (to study biting midges and brine flies) in 1969. His accomplishments included more than 400 scientific publications, mostly in public health and the taxonomy of Ephydriidae, Chironomidae, Canaceidae, Dolichopodidae, and especially Ceratopogonidae. He was widely recognized as the world's foremost authority on Ceratopogonidae.

Wirth was a Life Member and Fellow of the Entomological Society of America, having served on the Editorial Board, Thomas Say Foundation (1960-1964), and as secretary of Section A in 1960. He was also a member of the Entomological Society of Washington, Pacific Coast Entomological Society, Hawaiian Entomological Society, Florida Entomological Society, Kansas Entomological Society, Association for Tropical Biology, Biological Society of Washington, Washington Biologists' Field Club, and Society for Systematic Zoology. He was an adjunct professor of entomology at the University of Maryland and the University of Florida and a research associate of the Florida State Collection of Arthropods.

After retiring in 1984, Wirth moved to Gainesville, FL. There, he continued entomological research as a research associate of the Florida Department of Plant Industry. He remained active in entomology by presenting papers at meetings, submitting articles for scientific publication, serving on graduate student committees, and sharing his knowledge, experience, and insect collection with others. He was a friendly, kind, and generous person who will be greatly missed by all that knew him. As a scientist, he was an inspiration and a role model for others. His contributions to science will endure for many years to come.

Dr. Wirth's survivors include his wife, Mabel, of Gainesville; a son, William Frederick Wirth of Sullivan, WI; a daughter, Katherine Jarvis of Rock Cave, WV; two stepsons, Stephen Petranek of Chappaqua, NY, and Gary Petranek of Silver Spring, MD; a stepdaughter, Kathleen Moody of New Port Richey, FL; a brother, Arlow Wirth of Hartington, NE; a sister, Lois Davia of Homewood, IL; four grandchildren; and three step-grandchildren.

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