

## Obituaries

### Professor R. L. Usinger

WITH the death of Robert Usinger from cancer on October 1, 1968, at the age of 55, entomology loses an outstanding worker.

Usinger published his first paper in 1930 while still at high school, and so started his lifelong association with the taxonomy of the Heteroptera.

He obtained his BA from the University of California in 1935 and then went to the Hawaiian Islands for a year at the Bishop Museum, Honolulu, studying bugs of the genus *Nysius* and its allies for his PhD monograph.

On his return to California in 1936 he was appointed assistant curator at the California Academy of Science in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, where he worked with the celebrated hemipterist Dr E. P. van Duzee. During this period he became especially interested in the water bugs, particularly the marine species. In 1939 he obtained his PhD and was appointed to the staff of the Department of Entomology of the University of California at Davis.

During the Second World War, Usinger worked with the US Public Health Service on the control of the yellow fever mosquito in the south-west Pacific. He also completed his work on the Triatominae of North and Central America, a group of blood sucking bugs responsible for the transmission of the trypanosomes causing Chagas's disease. This work was published in 1944 and in the same year Usinger was appointed to the Faculty of Entomology and Parasitology of the University of California at Berkeley.

In 1948, Usinger went to Europe to attend the thirteenth international congress of entomology in Stockholm and afterwards spent nearly a year at the British Museum (Natural History) working on a proposed monograph of Reduviidae which unfortunately was never completed. During this time he planned his *Monograph of World Aradidae* to be published by the trustees of the British Museum. This was eventually published in 1959.

On his return to America in 1949, Usinger began working with Ferris on a world monograph of Cimicidae. This was published in 1966, eight years after the death of Ferris, and contained sections on morphology, physiology and cytology by Carayon, Davis, Ueshima and McKean. During this period he collaborated with Ernst Mayr and Gorton Linsley in writing *Methods and Principles of Systematic Zoology*, published in 1953.

By 1956 he had completed the manuscript of his Aradid monograph and took a holiday in Hawaii where he worked on the biology of the little known marine bug *Hermatobates*. On his return he collaborated with Professor T. Storer in revising the textbook *General Zoology* for a third edition which was published in 1957. In that year he set off on another expedition, this time to Central and South America, where he collected and studied Cimicidae in birds' nests.

Early in 1959, Usinger worked for several months with Carayon, in Paris, on the anatomy and physiology of the Cimicidae. Visiting Egypt on the way back to America he collected new species of Cimicidae from inside the Pyramids and from rock fissures in the cliffs at the Valley of Kings. These fissures were blasted open by quarry workers using dynamite. This must have been the first time explosives had been used to collect Hemiptera. From Egypt he travelled to the Belgian Congo where he studied the Central African fauna.

In 1963, Usinger wrote that he had arranged for a team of expert rock climbers to join him and had collected his first live *Synænderus* from white-throated swift nests on vertical cliffs 300 feet high in California!

Early in 1964, as director of the Galapagos International

Scientific Project, he spent two months in the Galapagos Islands, where he and Peter Ashlock succeeded in doubling the number of Hemiptera previously known from the islands. Much to his chagrin he failed to collect the remarkable *Stenocephalus* which Darwin first collected there. For this work Usinger was awarded the Medal of Merit from the Government of Ecuador.

When he died Usinger was chairman of the Entomology Division of the University of California, Berkeley, chairman of the Biology Division of the Pacific Science Board, National Academy of Science, a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and of the Pacific Coast Entomological Society, a member of the California Academy of Science, a past president of the Entomological Society of America and a fellow of the Royal Entomological Society of London.

## Correspondence

### New Constitution for British Physicists

SIR,—The article in *Nature* (220, 952; 1968) on the proposed Royal Charter for the Institute of Physics has drawn attention to points of general concern to scientists.

The present organization, an amalgamation of the Physical Society and the Institute of Physics formed in 1961, has so far kept both the Fellowship and the name of the Physical Society in being. The proposed changes would eliminate all traces of the Physical Society—in its 94th year!

Had these provisions been presented to the Physical Society at the time of the amalgamation, it is certain that the offer of joining the Institute of Physics on easy terms, in return for handing over all its assets, would have been rejected out of hand. Because of this, the present organization is under a moral obligation to act in the spirit of the amalgamation, as long as these assets are retained. It is, of course, perfectly legal for the council of the IPPS to use its massive (proxy) majority to force the present policy through; it will do so at a cost which no scientific body ought to be willing to pay—the cost of its reputation for integrity.

The reasons for which the Physical Society is to be sacrificed can hardly be described as compelling. They are faulty in logic, confused in motive and unhappy in phrasing. The Royal Charter, we are told, would be "a clear proclamation of leadership in the field of physics".

The present organization is the only one of its kind in Britain. What would it be leading?

The real point appears to be contained in the phrases: "This will give us leverage in the corridors of power" and "... a positive asset in enhancing ... the Institute and Society's role in ... international affairs".

This, then, is the benefit, so felicitously described as "intangible but nevertheless real". It is almost incredible that it should be seriously believed that the international (and, for that matter, national) standing of a scientific body depends on a Royal Charter and not solely on the scientific merits of its members.

It seems more probable that the "architects of the Charter" are convinced that "leverage in the corridors of power" is an attractive prospect to some senior members of the organization. What is being offered to the rank and file, however, is, in the classic words of Damon Runyon, "the old phonus bolonus".

Yours faithfully,

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