J. LINSLEY GRESSITT: HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENCE AND CONSERVATION

Wayne C. Gagné
Entomology Department
Bishop Museum
Honolulu, HI. 96819

Dr. J. Linsley (Lin) Gressitt and his wife Margaret (Peg) Kriete Gressitt perished in the crash of a Chinese jetliner near Ganchung, west of Canton, on 26 April 1982. The Gressitts were enroute to Guilin from Canton during their first return visit to China since 1951. Lin had taught and engaged in entomological research in China several times between 1935 and 1951. The couple were returning at the invitation of Zhongshan (formerly Sun-Yat-sen) University.

Dr. Gressitt was born on 16 June, 1914 in Tokyo, Japan. He attributed his early interest in natural history to his experiences as a boy scout in the Oakland area of San Francisco Bay. He was one of, and contemporaneous with, a most remarkable group of budding entomologists, all of whom later graduated from the University of California, Berkeley during the late '30s and early '40s. Among them were two close associates, Robert L. Usinger and Elwood C. Zimmerman, who are also well known among local and international entomological circles.

He published the first of his more than 300 scientific papers and books at the age of 20 in 1934. There has been an undiminished stream of articles since, particularly on beetle classification, especially the families Cerambycidae, Chrysomelidae and Curculionidae, and on biogeography, insect dispersal, biocontrol and economic entomology. He also had an early interest in herpetology and described several species of snakes, lizards, turtles and frogs from the Oriental Region. He received his B.S. (1938), M.S. (1939) and Ph.D. (1945) in entomology at the University of California, Berkeley.

He began his career with wide scientific interests and maintained these throughout. Some time during the 1930's he said that he was admonished to narrow his interests: "You can't cover everything," someone advised him as a young man. He then "focused" (at least by his estimation) his interests on the systematics of the three larger groups or families of Coleoptera (beetles): the weevils, the long-horned beetles and the leaf-eating beetles. I have to state that there are about as many species of these as much of the remaining Animal Kingdom together. His doctoral thesis was a massive tome on the leaf-eating beetles of China which remains to this day the standard reference work.

He became Entomologist-in-charge at the Lignan Natural History Survey and Museum in Canton, China from 1939-41 and from 1946-47. He was Assistant Professor at Lignan University from 1946-48 and Associate Professor there from 1948-51.

While serving with the US Navy in Guam, the Philippines and Okinawa from 1945-46 he worked on insects of medical importance. He then concentrated on searching for insects to biocontrol pestsof citrus and other crops for the University of California from 1947-51, spending much of the associated field work time in the Orient. During that time he led a successful expedition to find and collect seeds of the dawn redwood. In 1951 and 1952 he worked on coconut rhinoceros beetle ecology for the Pacific Science Board. He joined the Bishop Museum in 1953 where he devoted his energies to the establishment, development and expansion of its Entomology Department into world stature, and to which he was appointed its Chairman in 1954. He then also began a strong involvement in scientific publishing and founded the publishing programs of the Bishop Museum Entomology Department, including Insects of Micronesia, Pacific Insects, Pacific Insects Monographs and the Journal of Medical Entomology. He also founded a publishing program at the Wau Ecology Institute (WEI) which he had originally established as the Bishop Museum New Guinea Field Station in Papua New Guinea in 1961. There he began the WEI Leaflet, WEI Pamphlet, and WEI Handbook series especially for educational and conservation purposes for the New Guinea biota. He was long-time editor of these publications.

He was a shy and frugal man and must have often necessarily suffered the attendant social functions. But, as he tended to social introversion, his wife, Peg, was gregarious and extroverted. She surely was a most important factor in helping him through those societal necessities of a young man rapidly rising in forging and assuming responsibilities as a world-renowned scientist. In the last 15 or so years of his life, there was a most remarkable unfolding of this shyness of character. He still maintained his enormous drive, but now appeared less driven. These latter years were some of the more important ones in the sense of his satisfaction in accepting what we can view as two of his life's greatest accomplishments: the building of the Entomology Department at the Bishop Museum and the nurturing of the Wau Ecology Institute, which he also founded, from its beginnings as a small biological field station into a unique, independent research and educational facility which is also internationally recognized. These came to fruition because of his willingness to surmount mountains, both in the figurative and the real senses. He never shirked the administrative "long run" for the "short slide." There were always the the financial vicissitudes and other uncertainties to overcome, particularly in getting the Wau Ecology Institute on its feet. He would continuously tackle fund raising and poured his considerable energies into its whole spectrum, whether writing a grant application to the World Bank or asking for a contribution from the next door neighbor.

There were also the physical mountains. In fact, many of his far-flung field trips, particularly in the New Guinea region, had mountain tops as there destinations. These exploits earned him membership in the exclusive ExplorersClub and the naming of the Gressitt Glacier in Antarctica for him. He was able to collect insects and explore without breaking stride. So it is no coincidence that many of the species of beetles that he classified were denizens of these difficult and remote places. This field work was wide-ranging, taking him to most island groups of the Pacific Basin and to many nations of the west Pacific and Asia. His interest in insect dispersal took him practically to the Poles. He was especially known for his extensive field work throughout New Guinea,

where he returned most years for the past 26 as Director of WEI from its founding and subsequent local incorporation, as well as to continue research there. This culminated in his recent editorship of a two-volume work on the Biogeography and Ecology of New Guinea.

Dr. Gressitt was awarded a Guggenheim Fellow in 1955-56 in New Guinea, a Fullbright Fellow in 1960-61 in Australia, and received numerous other grant awards for research from the National Science Foundation, National Institute of Health, National Geographic Society and others. Among the many other awards received during his productive career was the Gregory Medal, given at the XIII Pacific Science Congress for his contributions in scientific research and development of scientific institutions.

He belonged to numerous scientific and conservation-oriented societies, including the Hawaiian Entomological Society, of which he was President in 1955 and to which he was recently granted Honorary Membership. He was a frequent contributor to its Proceedings, especially on the systematics of Hawaiian long-horned beetles.

Many young scientists owe the onset of their scientific careers to him. He gave unflagging support for unconventional scientific inquiries at their critical early onsets. Others were also bolstered by his growing concern for the conservation of natural diversity, particularly for the native ecosystems of the islands of the Pacific Basin. With this concern for the conservation of biotic diversity, he served on Governor Burns' Scientific Advisory Committee in the late 1960's and later helped convince the Governor to stop the proposed transferral of the axis deer to the Big Island. In the early 1970's he also served as the first Chairman of the Hawai'i Natural Area Reserves System Commission. It would then be appropriate to name some new Natural Area in his memory.

He joked about his so-called retirement last year, for then he could return to several of his old- and new-found professional passions: systematics, biogeography, conservation and the natural history of New Guinea with renewed and unfettered enthusiasm. For example, he organized the symposium on Pacific Basin Biogeography held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting of the Association of Systematics Collections at the Bishop Museum in May. Another recent undertaking was to start writing a popularized natural history of New Guinea for the WEI Handbook series. But, for the first time he began to admit that he probably could not finish some of the massive revisionary work on certain beetle genera, and the borrowed specimens he had begun to return to their various far-flung owners. He felt an obligation to finish others set aside over the years with the press of numerous committments. This was somewhat akin to a reacquaintance with old friends and endeavors, and it was ironically in this spirit that he relished his return to China after such a long hiatus.

The Gressitts are survived by their four daughters (Sylvia, Rebecca, Carolyn and Ellyn), and by Dr. Gressitt's sister (Felicia Bock) and by Mrs. Gressitt's brother (Bertrand Kriete) as well as by several grandchildren. At the request of the Family, the Bishop Museum has established a J.Linsley and Margaret K. Gressitt Memorial Fund. Donors are asked to specify whether they wish their contributions to apply to the Museum's WEI Ecology Fund or to Bishop Museum for general Museum support.