

DR CHARLES DENNIS ADAMS 1920 - 2005

The field of Tropical Biology, and in particular Caribbean Ecology and Plant Systematics, lost one of its most erudite scholars with the passing of Dr Charles Dennis Adams on the 25th March 2005. Dennis was born on the 23rd March 1920 in Shinfield, Berkshire, England. He attended King's College, University of London from 1937 to 1939. In 1940 he aborted his studies and volunteered for Military Service in the British Army. Moving up the ranks to Commanding Officer in the Weapon Training School in the Royal Artillery Depot, Woolwich, he ended his military career as a Major in the Royal Artillery in 1946. This was a significant period in his life for self discovery and his marriage in 1942 to Elsie, who died in 1986 ending 44 years of a fulfilling and loyal partnership.

Immediately after the war he returned to King's College to resume his university education, graduating with 2nd Class Honours in his BSc General (Botany, Chemistry, Zoology) in 1948 and obtaining 1st Class Honours in a BSc Special (Botany) for which he was awarded the Carter Prize in Botany in 1949. A brilliant scholar, he was now poised to make his contribution to botany. Post-war Britain was grim and depressing, and the opportunity to start a new life and career in one of the Crown Colonies, the Gold Coast (now Ghana), beckoned. A lectureship at the newly established University College of Gold Coast (University of Ghana) marked the beginning of a long and distinguished academic career in tropical plant ecology and taxonomy. His sojourn in Ghana from 1949 to 1959 led to numerous publications on West African vegetation and flora, focusing on pteridophytes and Compositae, establishing many new taxa, combinations and records.

The lure of writing and publishing Caribbean Floras took him to Jamaica to join the University College of the West Indies, Mona Campus (now the University of the West Indies) as a lecturer. The Jamaican era (1959-1976) would establish Dennis' reputation as the esteemed author of the *Flowering Plants of Jamaica* (1972) and other popular books such as *The Blue Mahoe* and *Other Bush* and *Caribbean Flora*. His formal academic career ended as a Senior Lecturer and Reader in Botany at the St Augustine Campus of the U.W.I. from 1976 to 1980.

C.D. Adams the scholar was equally matched by

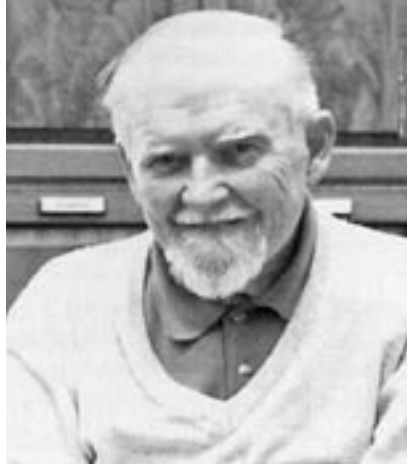


photo: Derek Adams (NHM Photo Studio)
Dennis Adams, April 2000

Dr. Adams the lecturer. To many of his students he was a conscientious and gifted teacher who imparted his knowledge with humility, simplicity and clarity. A stickler for organisation and details, nothing escaped his sharp eyes and quick wit. Spelling errors or inaccurate use of terminology were the ultimate travesty in scientific writing! These were perfect attributes for a reviewer, and his expertise was always in demand. While he applauded modern technology, computer jargon made him cringe.

On retirement, he came full circle to his homeland and became an Honorary Associate at The Natural History Museum in London, where flora research continued uninterrupted. He soon became involved with *Flora Mesoamericana*, contributing the accounts of *Asplenium* and *Diplazium* as well as many genera of flowering plants, and several other Caribbean studies involving phytogeography, ethnobotany and conservation. One of the high points of his retirement was a UN/FAO (United Nations/Food and Agriculture Organization) assignment in 1983 to the Maldives where he "*made an extensive survey of the flora and is probably the only authority on the subject*" (Webb, P.A. 1988. *Maldives People and Environment*. Media Transasia Lt. Thailand).

At the personal level he was a very modest and private individual who shunned the limelight. In his spare time he 'taxonomised' his precious stamp collection. Close friends enjoyed his delightful company, with his quick repartee and double entendre. A number of tributes to Dennis were published in 2000 in *The Fern Gazette* (Vol. 16, pts 1-2: 1-10) to mark his 80th birthday.

We extend our deepest sympathies to Dennis' two surviving younger brothers, Michael and John Adams.

Yasmin S. Baksh-Comeau

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