

Victor C. Quesnel (1925-2014)

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How does one summarize the work of such an accomplished naturalist as Dr. Victor Clement Quesnel? While it would be perfectly acceptable to speak solely of his personal life, given the choice, Victor would probably most like to be remembered by his academic and Club life.

His second eulogy (for such was the magnitude of Victor's life that two eulogies were read at his funeral) is reprinted in the first quarterly bulletin of 2015 and a much earlier dedication to Victor appeared in the Special Centenary Issue of the Living World in 1991. The account that follows was compiled from both documents, as well as from written accounts by Victor himself and comments from Club members.

Victor Quesnel was born in Port of Spain on 23 November, 1925. He was privately tutored from 1930 to 1934 and attended St. Mary's College from 1934 to 1944. He placed first in the Higher School Certificate Examination in 1944 and was not only awarded the Jerningham Gold Medal, but also won the science scholarship of that year.

He left Trinidad in 1944 to attend the University of Toronto where he obtained his B.A. in Physiology and Biochemistry in 1949. That summer he returned to Trinidad and met Ludolf Wehekind, the then President of the Trinidad Field Naturalists' Club, who informed Victor of the Club's grave need for a secretary (and without which the Club had not been able to meet). Victor indicated his willingness to accept the post after he had completed his studies and returned to the University of Toronto where he completed his M.A. in Plant Physiology in 1950. Post-graduate studies on the dependence of protein synthesis on RNA synthesis, continued at the University of Cambridge where he was awarded his doctorate in 1955.

By this time Victor had already returned to Trinidad "for good", in July 1953, and began his working career at the Colonial Microbiological Research Institute (CMRI) at Federation Park. He made good on his promise to the Club and on 28 January, 1954 at St. Mary's College, Victor became the Club's Honorary Secretary. He would hold that post for six years until he relinquished it on 11 February, 1960. During this time, he was behind the move to resuscitate the Journal of the Trinidad Field Naturalists' Club, production of which restarted in 1956. Following his stint at the CMRI, he began working at the Cocoa Research Unit at the University of the West Indies (UWI) in 1961, focusing on how the fermentation process affected the flavor of cocoa. He would eventually quit UWI in 1961

to dedicate his time to his hydroponic farm at Talparo.

Between 1975 and 1977, Victor served as Vice President of the Club and again as Honorary Secretary in 1980 and 1981. In 1984 and 1985 he returned as Vice President and then finally, between 1986 and 1988, he served as President.

Having revived the Club's journal in 1956, Victor served periodically on the editorial committee for a period of over 24 years. The Living World journal is one of the signature publications of the Club, where Victor's legacy is branded *ad infinitum* with the insect on our logo which is the Inca beetle, *Inca clathrata*. The subspecies found in Trinidad is *Inca clathrata quesneli*.

Within his field of work, he published twelve papers relating to the physiology and biochemistry of fermentation in cocoa beans. But it is perhaps his research outside of his profession for which he is most admired. Victor wrote at least one article in every issue of the journal from 1956 to 2008. He was happy doing original research in topics far from and has authored over 25 original research papers and co-written at least 11 papers with other researchers (See Appendix II), co-written three books on the natural history of Trinidad and Tobago (See Appendix III).

As noted by Adrian Hailey, Victor has consistently published over a sustained period of 55 years, in an extremely broad range of topics.

Dr. Quesnel was the first in the world to recognise the phenomenon of cyclorotating eyes in tadpoles, based on observations of a local tree frog. This is one example of an internationally influential paper published in 1956 on tadpole eye movement (that should have your eyes rotating).

Similarly, his joint paper in 2009 on *Anolis* lizards entitled, "The persistence of *Anolis trinitatis* as a naturalized lizard in Trinidad against hybridization pressure with *Anolis aeneus*", is an astonishing example of continuity in research efforts, as it refers back to the 1959 paper on two sibling species of anoles in Trinidad. Dr. Quesnel must be one of very few researchers to have published on the same topic 50 years apart - an example of a rare continuity of research effort. Victor's publications are well-cited by the international research community and will continue to be so for posterity.

It is not surprising that in order to be such a prolific writer Victor kept detailed field notes. These notes are compiled into 42 volumes of notebooks which in themselves are a valuable resource. These notebooks were handed

over by Victor to Yasmin S. Baksh-Comeau and Adrian Hailey, in the Department of Life Sciences at UWI, with the understanding that they will be published in the near future.

His fascination with the natural world manifested itself in other ways as well. He mapped cave systems, collected specimens for international museums and readily used his own body to satisfy various questions related to human health, including the effects of consuming charcoal and the toxicity of manchineel and mora.

Victor's health began to decline after a relatively minor surgical procedure and eventually it became difficult for him to attend meetings and other activities of the Club. On 22 December, 2014, he passed away in the company of his caregiver. His funerary mass at the St. Anthony's R.C. Church in Petit Valley was well attended and his body was cremated at the St. James Crematorium.

The list that follows is a compilation of the work of Victor Quesnel. It stands as testimony to the life of one of our country's greatest naturalists.

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