

Jorge Eduardo Wright, 1922–2005

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Summarizing the importance of a life in a few words is a difficult task. It is particularly difficult in the case of Jorge Eduardo Wright—professor, teacher, colleague, sometimes father figure and friend—who was a well recognized mycological figure for several generations of students in South America. Dr Wright or “Doctor”, as we all called him as if no other person around had a similar title, was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 20 Apr 1922. He died just before his 83rd birthday after a long battle with disease. He advised and mentored a great number of mycologists that today occupy positions in several universities, institutes and governmental and private agencies in Argentina and around the world.

Dr Wright graduated from the University of Buenos Aires in 1949 after studying the taxonomy and systematics of Argentinean Gasteromycetes, but his first contact with fungi was much earlier. In 1945 he joined the mycology section at the Phytopathology Laboratory of the former Ministry of Agriculture of Argentina. This laboratory was the cradle for the principal phytopathologists of the country at that time, such as Celina Iaconis, Clotilde Jauch and Juan B. Marchionatto, who were his mentors and teachers. Under the guidance of these mycologists Dr Wright learned to explore the world of the fungi.

Dr Wright’s fascination with the Basidiomycetes led him to apply to the University of Michigan for a master of science degree in the Botany Department under the direction of A.H. Smith. He studied there on a John Guggenheim Latin American Fellowship and returned home in 1955 with degree in hand. One year later he presented a series of papers on Gasteromycetes and other Basidiomycetes to the graduate committee at the University of Buenos Aires and was granted a doctoral degree in natural sciences. In 1960, 4 y after receiving his doctorate, the

University of Buenos Aires named Dr Wright as full professor of systematic botany in the Department of Biology. He kept his position until his retirement in 1988 after serving 30 y as faculty. He then was appointed consultant professor at the same institution until 2000.

Immediately after appointment as full professor Dr Wright obtained a fellowship from the US National Academy of Sciences to visit the National Fungus Collections in Beltsville, Maryland. It was during this visit that he developed the idea of a fungal collection for the University of Buenos Aires. It took him many years to see his ideas materialized, but with constant effort and inspiration he managed to create the Fungal Culture Collection (BAFC cult.), the only one of its kind in South America; it contains more than 2500 cultures and strains of a diverse group of fungi. Dr Wright’s vision also included a mycological library and herbarium. He built and organized the most complete and diverse mycological library in Argentina, where visitors consult volumes from different regions and other countries. The herbarium (BAFC) has more than 18 000 collections from Argentina and other countries; these collections are studied by taxonomists the world over. Dr Wright served as curator of both the herbarium and the culture collection even after his retirement. With herbarium, culture collection and library firmly established, one of Dr Wright’s remaining major concerns was the lack of a professional nonmedical mycological society in the country. He pushed for the creation of such a society, which was formed in the late 1990s under the name “Asociación de Micología Carlos Spegazzini”, with Dr Wright serving as its first president. Together with his publications and teachings, these efforts constitute his legacy to Argentinean mycologists and to the world.

Dr Wright provided thrust to mycology in Argentina for the past 50 years through intense research and teaching. He directed more than 20 doctoral dissertations in diverse areas of mycology ranging from taxonomic studies in many orders of Basidiomycetes to lichens, coprophilous fungi and micro-mycetes in the phyllosphere of *Eucalyptus viminalis* and fungal degradation of fur and hide in chinchillas. His students have developed several lines of research in mycology in Argentina and elsewhere. He always was interested in all aspects of fungi, stimulating discussion and research among his colleagues and students and embracing the development and growth of the field in his country. He never hesitated to

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FIG. 1. Dr Jorge E. Wright in 1975 during one of his frequent forays to Parque Nacional Iguazú, Misiones, Argentina.

respond to any question or failed to join us in our observations of fungi. He would stop whatever task in which he was immersed, walk to the library and guide us in the search for the right answer. He knew every book and article in the library, not only by their contents, but also by size, shape, color and location. His memory was amazing, although in his last few years he complained about how it was diminishing; nevertheless, it remained much superior to our own. His patience and perseverance were well known and

he tried to pass these qualities along to his students. One of his favorite sayings when we were trying to prepare microscope slides of hymenia was, "Cut 101 is the perfect one!"

Dr Wright's life was dedicated to scientific research. He was appointed senior research scientist of the Argentine National Research Council (CONICET) in 1961. He served as a member of many committees in CONICET and other national agencies. In 1984 he received the Cristobal M. Hicken Award from the

National Academy of Natural Sciences and Physics of Argentina. In 1993, in recognition of his work, he became a member of the aforementioned academy and in the same year the Mycological Society of America named him honorary member. He was the director of a special program of CONICET dedicated to the study of fungi involved in biological decay (PRHIDEB), which he conceived and steered for many years. He held the presidency of the Botany Society of Argentina twice and was appointed director of its bulletin. From these positions he advocated for excellence in research and publications. His contributions to the Bulletin of the Botany Society of Argentina were many and did not pass unnoticed. In celebration of his 70th birthday, a special volume of the bulletin, to which many prestigious mycologists contributed, was dedicated to Jorge E. Wright.

During his prolific career Dr Wright published more than 120 papers and several books and other articles in newspapers and textbooks about fungi in general, but the Gasteromycetes remained his favorite subject of study. In the last two years he worked at home, assisted by his most recent students and colleagues to produce two volumes about mushrooms of the pampa region of Argentina. Tended by his loving wife, his children, Alicia, Jorge, Gustavo and Pablo, his 18 grandchildren and two great grandchildren he was surrounded by the affection of his family to which he devoted as much time and energy as he did to his science. As a scientist he first observed his surroundings, rigorously observed again and finally studied the natural world. Today, where production governs over observation, it is unlikely that we will encounter figures like Dr Jorge E. Wright.

His students always will remember the "Doctor" in his field outfit: driving cap on his head and the never-missing collecting basket. He will be remembered with affection and admiration for his permanent curiosity and infectious capacity of wonder for the natural world. We will not forget him!

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