

James K. McPherson

1937-1994

Oklahoma lost a tireless botanist and conservationist on July 11, 1994, when James King McPherson, Professor Emeritus of Botany at Oklahoma State University, died unexpectedly of a heart attack. Jim served as President of the Oklahoma Academy of Science 1990-1992.

Jim was born in Tucson, Arizona, in 1937, and grew up in San Diego and Orange County, California. He received a B.S. in zoology from the University of Idaho in 1959. He married Iris McElroy in 1962. His graduate studies were in plant ecology under C. H. Muller at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he earned an M.S. in 1966 and a Ph.D. in 1968. He was a member of the faculty of the Department of Botany at Oklahoma State University from 1968 until his retirement in 1992. He served as acting Head of Botany at OSU in 1980-81. During his tenure at OSU, Jim McPherson distinguished himself as a scholar, teaching students in areas ranging from vegetational surveys to allelopathy in sunflowers. His course in field botany was well-known for its rigor, formidable organization, and photograph gallery with captions contributed by students. Although students often approached this course with trepidation because of his reputation as an exacting scholar, after several field trips they knew him well enough to realize how much he cared about their education and about them. He also developed a summer field course on plants of the southern Rocky Mountains. He set a fast pace, both on foot and intellectually. Many of his former students, now widely dispersed, continue to praise his greatness as a teacher and report that they think of McPherson whenever they identify a plant.

Throughout his career Jim was active in volunteer service, and after his retirement from OSU much of his talent and energy was directed into work for the Nature Conservancy and the Sierra Club. He managed the Conservancy's Springer Prairie Preserve and contributed expertise and labor to the new Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in Osage County. He was completing a study of the flora of the Black Mesa area in the Oklahoma Panhandle. Jim was awarded the Oklahoma Nature Conservancy's Stewardship Award in 1992 and shortly before his death had learned that he would receive the National President's Stewardship Award at the Conservancy's national meeting in Tucson in September. He was president of the Stillwater Group of the Sierra Club. In recent years, he led Sierra Club National Service Outings in the Ruby Mountains of Nevada and the San Juan Wilderness of Colorado and was scheduled to lead another in September of this year.

Shortly after moving to Oklahoma, Jim and Iris built a beautiful home overlooking a wooded ravine east of Perkins. There they raised two sons, Andy McPherson, who has just graduated in chemistry from the University of California, Davis, and George McPherson, now living in Stillwater. Those of us who knew Jim will remember his energy, good judgement, and humor with warm affection and gratitude for his friendship.

*James D. Ownby
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