

OBITUARY

ERNST J. DORNFELD (1911-1983)



Dr. Ernst J. Dornfeld (1911-1983), author of "The Butterflies of Oregon" (1980) (photo taken Nov. 1979 by John Neyhart).

Ernst J. Dornfeld died on 30 May 1983 in Corvallis, Oregon at the age of 72. A professional cell biologist, he had been chairman of the Department of Zoology at Oregon State University for 24 years prior to his retirement in 1976. He was interested in butterflies and skippers with a special interest in the fauna of Oregon, culminating in his book on the Butterflies of Oregon, published in 1980.

Ernst was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on 6 April 1911, the son of Ernst Phillip Dornfeld and Gertrude Dornfeld. His father, a Lutheran minister, encouraged him when he showed interest in butterflies at an early age. He attended Concordia College and then Marquette University, receiving his B.S. degree from Marquette in 1933. He began his graduate work at the same institution, then moved on to the University of Wisconsin, at Madison, where he received his M.A. degree in 1935 and his Ph.D. in 1937. He spent the summer of 1935 at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

His graduate research work was in cell biology and occupied most of his time during that period. He did serve as Assistant in Lower Zoology at the Milwaukee Public Museum from 1930 to 1932, while an undergraduate student at Marquette. Ernst often acknowledged the strong influence his germanic heritage exerted on his scientific work and on his interest in the liberal arts. It was his feeling that his broad interests were encouraged by his family and by the many cultural activities in Milwaukee, including the Milwaukee Public Museum. This institution continues to occupy a prominent position in the cultural life of Milwaukee.

Ernst spent a year as an instructor in histology and embryology at the University of Oklahoma School of Medicine before coming to the then Oregon State College in 1938 as an instructor of Zoology. He moved up through the academic ranks to Assistant Professor in 1942, Associate Professor in 1946, Professor in 1950 and Chairman of the Department of Zoology in 1952, a position he held until his retirement from Oregon State University in 1976 as Professor Emeritus of Zoology. He married Lorena Sue Ferguson in 1945. They had five children, Ernst, Susan, Ruth, Margaret and Carl.

Ernst had a long and distinguished career as an academician and as a cell biologist. When he joined the department in 1938, there were six faculty members. When he retired in 1976, the department had grown to 17 faculty members. He was an unusually fine teacher, well organized, thorough, articulate and enthusiastic. During his years on the faculty, he taught eight different courses ranging from general zoology to the biology of the cell. He was well regarded by his students, receiving the Loyd Carter Award for "Inspirational Teaching" in 1947, the second such award to be given.

Ernst was an accomplished research scientist besides a teacher. His research centered on cell biology, particularly cell division and differentiation. He published 47 scientific papers, including 9 on the Lepidoptera. It is of interest to note that his first and last papers were on butterflies. Ernst received the Society of Sigma Xi Research Award in 1961, the Distinguished Professor Award from the Oregon State University Alumni Association in 1978 and the Citation for Outstanding Scientific Achievement from the Oregon Academy of Science in 1981. While his earlier awards were based largely upon his work in cell biology, gradually his expertise with the Lepidoptera became better known and added to his stature as a scientist, culminating in the appearance of his book on Oregon butterflies.

His interest in butterflies extended back to his childhood days and the encouragement he received from his family. He amassed a large collection of Wisconsin butterflies prior to coming to Oregon. Some of these specimens were contributed to the Milwaukee Public Museum at the time. His interest in Lepidoptera remained throughout his life but other research interests, particularly in cell biology, dominated his professional career for many years. His interest in butterflies was revived when one of his sons became interested in them in the early 1950's. Ernst began to study and collect the Oregon fauna with the same zeal and enthusiasm that he brought to his other work. He made numerous field trips into all parts of Oregon and gradually built up a magnificent collection of approximately 25,000 specimens, largely from Oregon. He compiled meticulous records of his own material and that of others against the day when he would have the time to complete his book on the fauna of Oregon. His retirement in 1976 provided him with that time he needed. He started to work on that book almost on the day he retired. It appeared in 1980, just the way he wanted it to be. He was able to incorporate the summed knowledge of each species found in the state, based on his own work and that of others. There were many others, for Ernst established and maintained contact with a number of lepidopterists, freely sharing his own knowledge and experience. His willingness to share and his enthusiasm was extended to a good many children in Corvallis, including the three sons of one of us (J.D.L.), who quickly learned that Ernst knew all there was to know about butterflies. Often, it was difficult to determine who was more excited over an interesting catch, Ernst or the youthful entomologist!

Ernst delivered the annual Sigma Xi lecture in 1978 entitled "About Butterflies." It was a beautifully prepared and illustrated lecture and was very well received. It was so well received, in fact, that shortly before he died, he told us that he had given that talk 26 times since 1978. He was a member of the Lepidopterists' Society for many years

and served as co-host for the 1967 meeting held at Oregon State University. He was an active participant in the various lepidopterists' workshops held around the northwest. His last active role was to host such a workshop in November of 1982 at Oregon State.

The Dornfeld collection, including his library and records, has been bequeathed to the Systematic Entomology Laboratory (SEL), Department of Entomology, Oregon State University. The SEL contains approximately 2.4 million specimens, including the largest collection of butterflies in the Pacific Northwest. Ernst donated thousands of hours to the SEL. He worked over the entire collection of butterflies in his meticulous fashion, even leaving room throughout the collection for his own specimens. He was very active in encouraging others to donate their collections as well, resulting in thousands of additional specimens for the collection. He took his scientific responsibilities very seriously.

While he was serious about his science, he was also infectiously enthusiastic and had a wonderful sense of humor. He was a perfectionist in everything he did but enjoyed nothing more than a joke upon himself. Both of us shared field and laboratory experiences with him for many years. We remember his warmth and friendship and especially his chuckle that often erupted into a loud laugh. Ernst had a love of life and learning and a real passion for butterflies. It was our privilege to have shared a part of his life.

Our thanks to John Neyhart, Roseburg, Oregon, for the fine photograph of Ernst.

Lepidoptera Publications by Ernst J. Dornfeld

- 1931 Dornfeld, Ernst J. A night-flying butterfly and some unusual locality records (Lepidoptera). *Entomol. News* 42:287.
- 1960 Dornfeld, Ernst J. *Mitoura johnsoni* in Oregon and California. *J. Lepid. Soc.* 13: 183.
- 1962 Dornfeld, Ernst J. Butterflies of Oregon. *Bull. Oregon Entomol. Soc.* 8:50.
- 1964 Dornfeld, Ernst J. Favorite collecting spots—The Ochoco Mountains. *Bull. Oregon Entomol. Soc.* 16:123–125.
- 1967 Dornfeld, Ernst J. On the yellow forms of *Coenonympha tullia* (Satyridae) in Oregon. *J. Lepid. Soc.* 21:1–7.
- 1970 Dornfeld, Ernst J. A field-captured scale-deficient mutant of *Anthocaris sara*. *J. Res. Lepid.* 9:25–28.
- 1971 Dornfeld, Ernst J. & John Hinchliff. Check List of Oregon Rhopalocera with County Records and Flight Periods. [2] + 7 + 5 pages, 1 map. Corvallis, Oregon: Dornfeld and Hinchliff.
- 1980 Dornfeld, Ernst J. The Butterflies of Oregon. Timber Press, Forest Grove, Oregon. XIV, 276 pp. 4 colored plates, 48 black-and-white plates, 192 maps.
- 1983 Hammond, Paul C. & Ernst J. Dornfeld. A new subspecies of *Speyeria egleis* (Nymphalidae) from the pumice region of Central Oregon. *J. Lepid. Soc.* 37:115–120.

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