OBITUARY

EDWARD HOLT EASON M.A., M.B.(Cantab.), F.L.S.
1915-1999

Dr Edward Eason was born at Holmes Chapel in Cheshire in 1915, the son of a Manchester cotton broker. From an early age he was keen on natural history and country pursuits. He attended Malvern College where he came under the influence of Theodore Savory, the biology master, already a well-known naturalist and a student of the Arachnida. Edward was riding with the Cheshire hounds at 18. He went up to Cambridge, Pembroke College and joined the OTC Calvalry squadron. He read Medicine at Cambridge and completed his medical training at University College, London.

Dr. Eason served in the RAMC in India and Burma during the war and trained in field ambulances; he was in charge of horses and mules; he trained the animals, and the men to swim and has alarming tales of crossing the Irrawaddy, Chindwin and other rivers both in advancing and again in retreat. Dr. Eason had a critical mastoid operation as a youth. His deafness suffered during the harsh conditions of the campaign and he was invalided out to the Field Laboratory of Tropic Diseases at Maymya. Not with standing his disability and arduous active service he found time to make observations on hunting wasps, dung beetles and tree ants. These were subsequently published in the Proceedings of the Cotteswold Naturalist’s Field Club (1975). After the war Dr. Eason served as a civilian pathologist for a few years but this was not to his taste and his deafness precluded General Practice.

After his marriage to Vivian Haynes in 1948 he took up farming and occupied Bourton Far Hill in the Cotswolds. I first met Edward in Manchester after we had begun corresponding, shortly after his paper on Lithibius aulacopus as new to Britain from near Windermere in the Lakes. Soon after I had the pleasure of visiting Ted and Vivian on their farm. He showed me his laboratory and also we had a tour of the farm. They specialised in beef cattle and horses. My visit came shortly after one of their horses, Airs and Graces, ridden by Sheila Wilcox, won the Badminton horse trials in 1959. Both Ted and Vivian rode with the hounds. Ted was an advocate and practitioner of natural farming, using as few inorganic fertilisers as possible and retaining horse power for the ploughing.

The first of three landmarks in Dr. Eason’s rise to pre-eminence in the study of Chilopoda was the publication of his monograph Centipedes of the British Isles Frederick Warne, 1964, pp294, 490 Figs, 5 Plates, which still remains the standard work; originally priced at £3.3.0 and now on the rare occasion that a copy comes on the market, will be priced at around £80. The book is notable for the great care and precision of the authors own figures and text. It is dedicated to Theodore Savory, for inspiring him with an interest in Arthropoda.

The second landmark was the award in 1980 of the Stamford Raffles Prize for amateur research, by the Zoological Society of London for “distinguished work on the taxonomy of centipedes”. At this time, Eason had published 27 papers including
species from Siberia, Hawaii, Seychelles, Sardinia and Majorca. In a paper presented to the second International Congress of Myriapoda in Manchester in 1972 on Certain Aspects of Generic Classification of the Lithobiidae with Special Reference to Geographical Distribution Eason writes “A revised classification of the Lithobiidae is obviously required but will be a vast undertaking...a compromise between the lumping of Attems and the splitting of Chamberlain...should enable the Lithobiidae to make their due contribution to zoogeographical knowledge”.

The third landmark, or rather phase, consisted of a further 28 publications based on collections from Papua, Macaronesian Islands, Afghanistan, Thailand, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Falkland Isles, Kurile Islands and European countries. These papers go a large part of the way to completing the ‘vast undertaking’ he referred to in 1974. The last paper, on Kirghizia and Kazakhstan, he says “is my swan song...shall not be writing more as my eye sight and manual dexterity are both failing” – this note in his 82nd year!

Dr Eason attended many of the International Congresses in Myriapodology; to many of these we travelled together and I valued his amiable companionship. The last I remember was our trip to Innsbruck in 1990. This included a lightening dash between Paddington and Victoria (Ted was 75) just catching the last train to Moreton-in-Marsh; I stayed the night at Bourton Far Hill; the next day he took me on a tour of the trees he had planted, partly as a means of earning a little semi-retirement from farming.

Many students of the Chilopoda, from many parts of the world visited Bourton Far Hill. Both Ted and his visitors enjoyed the newly sylvan aspect of much of his land. It is with deep respect and admiration that many of his friends will bid their farewells to our elder Statesman of Myriapodology. Dr Eason leaves a daughter, Marian and a grandson.

J. Gordon Blower
E.H. EASON

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS


55. 1996. Lithobiomorpha from Sakhalin Island, the Kamchatka peninsula, and the Kurile Islands. *Arthropoda Selecta* **5**: 117-123.