
In Memorium Roddy Ward

Roddy Ward – Nxatshane - Bayete Baba, Bayete

Roddy Ward, a much loved and respected lecturer, colleague and friend to many, passed away in the early hours of Sunday morning 5th July 2015. At 88, he was possibly the oldest practicing ecologist in South Africa...having started officially with the then NPB in 1953! Despite having an ankle problem, he was still busy making plans to go down the Transkei coast with Keith Cooper, to look at some shifting dunes at the end of this month. The late Ian Player, with whom Roddy worked with amongst the other great Game Rangers of the 1953-1963 era considered him "the finest plant ecologist in Africa". Many people working in the fields of ecology, botany, conservation and other branches of the natural sciences will have fond memories of Roddy.

His incredible knowledge of plants, plant succession, ecology, his remarkable memory, amazing observation skills and attention to detail and above all his willingness and enthusiasm for sharing all he knew with anybody who was interested or came to ask his opinion. Roddy was a member of the Natal Parks Board from 1953 to 1963 and was the first ecologist employed by the Board. He formed close friendships with many of the game rangers and would accompany them on patrols collecting samples and taking photographs. His account of attending a Board meeting and telling them that they would have to "remove" animals because the vegetation would not sustain them is amusing. He was asked to leave the room whilst they discussed the options and on his return was asked if he actually meant shooting animals with a gun....to which he replied in the affirmative much to the contrary of the preservation principles of the time.

Prior to his NPB days, Roddy was botany lecturer at the Durban Tech – an occupation he returned to in 1963 when he joined the University based on Salisbury Island that subsequently moved to become the University of Durban Westville – position he held for some twenty five years. He was a perfectionist when it came to writing and thus his publications were not that numerous – in fact his MSc on the Isipingo area – which earned him the Captain Scott Medal - took twenty-two years to complete! His other credits and tributes during his life aside, we are remembering him as a colleague and friend, a perfect gentleman and one of a kind - always with a twinkle in his eye and kindly disposed. Roddy was a member of the KZN branch of IAIAsa (International Association for Impact Assessment) and when attending functions, and when attending functions would sit quietly, reflecting, unless he was asked his opinion. Rod Bulman on one occasion made the remark that somebody like Roddy was a "living treasure"!

In Memorium

In the recent past Roddy received several medals and awards. One that meant a great deal to him was being made an Honorary Life Member of the Game Rangers Association of Africa at the AGM at Cape Vidal in 2012. His certificate was an enormous sense of pride to him – displayed in the lounge and will be well cared for by his surviving son. Go well Roddy – Bayete! We like to imagine you are now in a place free from alien and invasive plants and know you will still discover things new and unseen by others to enthuse about with those interested. Hamba kahle! We will miss you.



Roddy Ward (left) with his friend Frank Farquharson.
(Photo by courtesy of Jim Feely)

