

Richard Werner (1936 - 2017)

Obituary



Dr. Richard "Skeeter" Werner (81) transcended to the spirit world on Saturday, July 8, 2017. He was at home, surrounded by his beloved family and the natural world he so loved.

He was born in Mohnton, Pa., in 1936 to Roy and Hazel (Rightmeyer) Werner. He attended schools in the Mohnton School District and graduated from Governor Mifflin High School in 1954. With a love of nature and the outdoors, he was active in scouting and earned the rank of Eagle Scout. He enrolled at the Mont Alto School of Forestry, a branch of Penn State University and graduated with a B.S. degree in Forestry in 1958. Skeeter went on to earn advanced degrees in Forest Entomology, Secondary Education, Entomology/Insect Physiology and a Ph.D. in Entomology/Insect Toxicology.

A summer job doing forest inventory on the Umpqua National Forest in south-central Oregon exposed him to the grandeur of the PNW. He later discovered a love of research and began his research career at the Alaska Forest Research Institute in Juneau, Alaska.

He met his wife, Pat Thomas, while at the Southeastern Forest Experiment Station at Research Triangle Park, N.C. Promising her Alaska, they married on August 25, 1973 at Dawes Arboretum, Newark, OH. The following year, they embarked on a 23-year adventure in Fairbanks, Alaska. The arrival of their children, Sarah and Luke, enhanced the experience. As a family, they were involved with youth and community activities and enjoyed many year-round outdoor activities with friends and family including gardening, camping, fishing and snow sports.

Skeeter was a pioneer in entomology, he would be confronted with a problem and seek to understand as much as he could. This led him to become an expert on the spear-marked black moth during an outbreak in Alaska in 1974. His research also led him to become a world authority on the spruce beetle and other boreal forest insects. Skeeter took pride in international collaborations, cross-jurisdictional work and continued friendships. After 37 years with the USDA Forest Service, he retired and moved his family to Corvallis, Oregon. He has authored 125 scientific publications including two books.

After retirement, Skeeter's passion and dedication to bark beetle research in Alaska was evident by sixteen additional years of volunteer field work. His family became quite used to seeing bugs in vials and tubes of beetles in the freezer, waiting to be counted. In addition, he became involved in Long Term Ecological Research (LTER) at the Institute of Arctic Biology, University of Alaska conducting research on the effects of climate change on forest insects.

Among the honors he has received are a Certificate of Merit in 1989 for research following the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Prince William Sound, AK; a Centennial Fellows Award in 2004 from Penn State Mont Alto for scientific contributions to the field of forestry; and for his lifetime accomplishments, he was recognized with the Founders Award from the Western Forest Insect Work Conference. An achievement he proudly shared with one of his closest friends. In 2014, he was selected as an outstanding alumnus of the Pennsylvania State School of Forestry.

His friends and family will remember him for his constant drumming, infectious smile, stories and wildlife encounters and his longing to be outdoors. Skeeter's compassion for the Earth and eagerness to help others was surpassed only by his unconditional love of family and his many lifelong friends.

He is survived by his wife Pat, daughter Sarah (Chris) Bates, son Luke (Katie) Werner; and grandchildren Payton and Amelia Bates, and Maxwell Werner; sisters Dorothy (Roger) Houck, Audrey (Phil) Gum and brother John (Kathy) Werner, as well as many beloved nieces and nephews.

Skeeter would encourage you to take the time to enjoy life and the natural world around you. A celebration of life is planned for September. Donations in Skeeter's name can be made to the Corvallis Community Band, Georgeson Botanical Garden (Fairbanks) www.georgesonbotanicalgarden.org or any cause that strives to enhance our world.

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