

In Memoriam: Hugh Bosdin Leech (1910-1990)

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Hugh Bosdin Leech (Fig. 1), Curator Emeritus, California Academy of Sciences, an authority on Coleoptera and particularly aquatic beetles, and Curator of Coleoptera at the California Academy of Sciences from 1947 until his retirement in 1975, died on 8 November 1990, at San Rafael, California, from complications attributed to pneumonia and Alzheimer's disease. In addition to his expertise on Coleoptera, he was a curator par excellence and was exceedingly helpful to both students and established researchers. He contributed nearly 350 articles and notes in the field of Entomology. By the time of his death, in 1990, 85 insects and related arthropods had been named in his honor by his peers and correspondents.



FIGURE 1. Photograph of Hugh Bosdin Leech (right) and Edwin C. Van Dyke (left) examining dried insect specimens on cellulose cotton layers prior to sorting and preparation (taken at the California Academy of Sciences ca. 1950). N1877 California Academy of Sciences Archives, Special Collections, San Francisco, CA.

Hugh B. Leech was born at Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada, on 10 May 1910. His father had emigrated to Canada from Manchester, England, where Hugh's grandfather, Sir Bosdin T. Leech, who served as mayor of Manchester, had been knighted by Queen Victoria in recognition of his influence in the building of the Manchester Ship Canal. Hugh received his early education in Lakefield, Ontario, at the Lakefield Preparatory School, and in British Columbia at the Vernon Preparatory School in Vernon, and the Salmon Arm High School in Salmon Arm. He earned his B.Sc. degree from the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, in 1933, and his M.Sc. degree from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1938. At Berkeley he was associated with Professor E.O. Essig; and it was there that he first met Dr. Edward S. Ross.

Hugh's interest in insects and natural history began at an early age on his father's farm at Salmon Arm. He was encouraged by his parents — by what Leech once published as his father's keen interest in “birds and plants, and [his father] had a remarkably broad yet detailed knowledge of the families and habits of insects” and to his mother “with her love of flowers, books, and the beauty of the countryside.” (H.B. Leech, pers. comm.) During his high school years, Hugh was introduced to Ralph Hopping at the Forest Entomology Laboratory in Vernon, British Columbia;

and under Hopping's guidance, his interest in and knowledge of beetles grew rapidly. Ralph Hopping had been lured from his position with the United States Forest Service, leaving California in 1919 to serve as Forest Entomologist, Dominion Department of Agriculture, at Vernon, where he was free to publish original observations. He had not been allowed to publish under his own name in the United States. Nearly all of the 36 articles that he published appeared after 1920. Hopping retired in 1939, died on October 29, 1941, and it was his wish that his collection, the major portion of which was amassed prior to his move to Canada, would be donated to the California Academy of Sciences. The collection, consisting of 97,197 specimens housed in 411 boxes, was transferred to the Academy in May, 1948 by Hugh and Dr. Edward S. Ross, who succeeded in packing it all into one Academy suburban. A representative collection of British Columbia material naturally remained in Canada.

Hugh's knowledge of Coleoptera and other insects was such that, from 1930 to 1947, whenever he was not attending the university, he was employed at the Forest Entomology Laboratory in Vernon. Hugh became well known to Bay Area entomologists through his matriculation at the University of California, Berkeley in 1937 and 1938. His wife of 55 years, Frances recalls how the two years at Berkeley were lean years "where a little bit of money had to go a long way." (pers. comm.) Their first son, Robin, was born in Berkeley while Hugh was completing his Master of Science Degree.

Following the 2nd World War, in 1947, with the expansion of the staff of the Entomology Department of the California Academy of Sciences, Hugh was selected as a new Assistant Curator to join the existing staff of Drs. Ross and Edward L. Kessel. The department did not have either a secretary or technical assistants at this time. Hugh was placed in charge of the largest section of the collection — the beetles (Coleoptera) — probably over a million specimens. On a visit to the Academy in 1947, one of us (PHA) can recall how Dr. Edwin C. Van Dyke (1869–1952), then Curator Emeritus, was pleased to announce that Hugh B. Leech would be arriving soon as a new Curator to the Department. Dr. Van Dyke, a medical doctor and former Professor of Entomology at the University of California, Berkeley, had given his collection of nearly a quarter of a million specimens to the Academy; and his colleague, Dr. Frank E. Blaisdell (1862–1946), former head of the Stanford University Cooper Medical School, had likewise presented his collection of 200,000 beetles to the Academy. As indicated by the avocational interests of these two MDs, at the turn of the century there were relatively few positions in the field in Entomology, so that it was often medical doctors and other professionals that were active in the discipline.

As a matter of fact, in addition to the million Coleoptera, Hugh curated other portions of the Academy collection as well, including the Hymenoptera. He also served as Acting Chairman during the many long absences of Dr. Edward S. Ross in his world travels. As was the departmental policy for some staff at the time, Hugh did the writing for his research and publications at home. As his son has written, "He reserved his 'Academy Time,' as he called it, for correspondence, curating and visitors" (Leech 1991:95). Much of his field work was done on family vacations and on weekends. Exceptions included a trip to mainland Mexico in 1948 with Dr. Ross, a particularly productive trip to Arizona in 1952 with J. Wagener Green, a Belvedere Scientific Expedition to Baja California in the winter of 1958–1959 by land with Dr. Alan E. Leviton (see Fig. 2), and a trip to northern Baja California with one of the authors (PHA) in 1963.

Hugh had a favorite work table adjacent to his desk cubicle at which he would sit with visitors to the department. He would accomplish some of the necessary curation, such as the pinning of outgoing or incoming loans, while still involved in conversation. During his career he helped hundreds of students and research workers. As Kavanaugh and Arnaud have published (1981) "He is orderly and precise, tough-minded, independent, but with a keen sense of humor which permits him to

keep details in perspective. He is also a superb correspondent, adept at handling the kinds of exchange that characterize the curator's role as interface between collection resources (both specimens and information) and the users of those resources. A trusting person, Hugh has been willing to take a chance on the unproven. Consequently, he has been extremely helpful to students or others just getting started in insect systematics by providing information or loaning specimens when other curators might have refused to do so; and he has done much to foster careers in entomology through his continued encouragement to colleagues, both young and old." He was rightly called a "Curator's Curator."

Following their retirements Hugh and Frances moved inland from their home in the foggy Seacliff area of San Francisco into a newly built log house on 44 acres of land on Howell Mountain, just east of Angwin, in Napa County, California. From this new home they had a beautiful view overlooking the tranquil Pope Valley. It was here that Hugh could develop his gardens with hand tools and hours of his labor. He could collect insects in the vicinity of his home and continue the rearing of insects inhabiting dead wood which led to a wealth of precise information on insect/host plant associations and interspecific interactions. Hugh could also continue his life-time interest in stamps - he was one of the leading authorities on pre-Communist Chinese stamps, and was an active member of San Francisco's China Clipper Stamp Society (serving as its President). Regrettably the distance of his home on Howell Mountain in Napa County from the Academy precluded frequent visits to this institution during his retirement.

On the occasion of his seventieth birthday Hugh was honored with a special issue of *The Pan-Pacific Entomologist* (volume 57, number 1, pages 1–320, 1981). A total of 24 papers was presented in that issue, 23 of which dealt the taxonomy, biology, and/or distribution of aquatic Coleoptera, the field of Hugh's principal research interest. Included were the descriptions of three new genera and five new species named in Hugh's honor. The 24th paper (Kavanaugh and Arnaud 1981) was a biography, which described Hugh's career and included lists of his publications, taxa that he described, and taxa named in his honor. Because Hugh's last paper was published in 1978, the lists of his publications and described taxa provided in 1981 remain complete. However, an additional 17 new species and three new genera named in his honor are listed here in Appendix A.

Hugh was survived at the time of his death by his wife Frances Orchid Quail Leech, of Novato, California, three sons — Dr. Robin E. Leech, of Edmonton, Canada, William H. Leech of Santa Ana, California, Thomas S. Leech of Novato, California - one daughter - Mary Kathleen (Leech) Huffaker from near Alpine, California — and by six grandchildren, living in both Alberta and California, and two great-grand children.

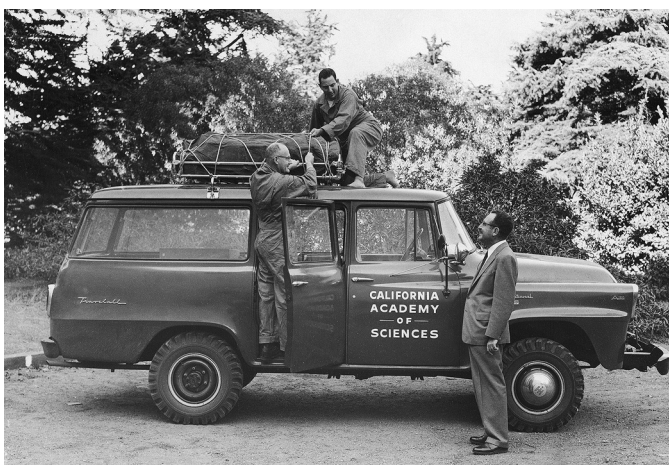


FIGURE 2. Photograph of Hugh Bosdin Leech (standing in doorway) and Alan E. Leviton (Assist. Curator of Herpetology, on roof) preparing the Academy field vehicle for the Belvedere Scientific Expedition to Baja California in the winter of 1958-1959, with Academy Director, Robert C. Miller, (standing at right) supervising. N19796A California Academy of Sciences Library, Special Collections, San Francisco, CA

Literature Cited

- KAVANAUGH, D.H., AND P.H. ARNAUD, JR.. 1981. Hugh Bosdin Leech—a curator's curator. *Pan-Pacific Entomologist* 57:2–42.
- LEECH, R.E. 1991. Hugh Bosdin Leech (1910–1990). *The Coleopterists Bulletin* 45:95–96.

APPENDIX A. ADDITIONAL TAXA NAMED IN HONOR OF HUGH B. LEECH²

CLASS INSECTA

Order Ephemeroptera**Family Baetidae**

Baetis leechi Day, 1954 (California)

Order Coleoptera**Family Chrysomelidae**

Proctophana leechi Moldenke, 1981 (Brazil)

Family Curculionidae

Pseudothysanoes leechi Wood, 1980 (California)

Family Dermestidae

Dermestes leechi Kalik, 1952 (India)

Family Dytiscidae

Desmopachria leechi Young, 1981 (Florida)

Hughbosdineus Spangler new genus, 1981

Hughbosdineus leechi Spangler, 1981 (Venezuela)

Hydroporus leechi Gordon, 1981 (California)

Oreodytes leechi Zimmerman, 1985 (Alaska)

Family Elmidae

Huleechius Brown new genus, 1981

Xenelmis leechi Perkins and Steiner, 1981 (Peru)

Family Eubriidae

Ectopria leechi Brigham, 1981 (Illinois)

Family Hydraenidae

Hughleechia Perkins new genus, 1981

Hughleechia giulianii Perkins, 1981 (Australia)

Hydraena leechi Perkins, 1981 (Arizona)

Limnebius leechi Perkins, 1980 (California)

Ochthebius leechi Perkins and Wood, 1978 (California)

Family Hydrophilidae

Hydrochara leechi Smetana, 1980 (New Mexico)

Laccobius leechi Cheary, 1971 (California)

Order Diptera**Family Anthomyiidae**

Delia leechi Griffiths, 1993 (California)

² Taxa not included in Kavanaugh and Arnaud (1981, Appendix C)