
Obituary

Shirley Anne Hanrahan (1939–2018)

Shirley was born, lived and worked in a small radius around the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, but her influence had a worldwide reach. She was an enthusiastic entomologist and played a significant role in promoting entomology within South Africa. She was a long-standing member of the Entomological Society of Southern Africa and served the Society in many positions. Shirley served as President of the Society from 1997–1999 and again from 2001–2003 as well as Vice-President (1993–1996 and 1999–2001). In 2003, Shirley took over the role of editor of *African Entomology* and continued in this role until 2011. During this time she formed the link with the non-profit publisher BioOne for *African Entomology* to join their journal database. This proved to be an inspired connection that has significantly helped with the finances of the Society. Shirley carefully stewarded several issues of the journal to completion and assisted the current editor, Barry Blair, with the handover.

Shirley had a talent for getting people to connect with one another. As one example, in 1993 she was chair of the local organising committee for the ESSA congress held at the University of the Witwatersrand. At this congress the consumption of insects made international news. We remember that after the first evening welcoming function which was so enjoyed by all that the party went on late, Shirley was back at the residence early the next morning to ensure that the guests from the rest of Africa were receiving breakfast. Another example is that Anthony Watsham's illustrations of chalcid wasps were published in book form in 1995 due to the influence of Shirley. She had felt for some time that the illustrations should be more visible than being kept in a drawer in the National Collection of Insects. The result was a beautifully illustrated book with the text by Gerhard Prinsloo and the cover design and layout by Nico Dippenaar, who has been involved in the Entomological Society journal for many years.

One of the greatest achievements that Shirley



accomplished for entomology in South Africa – and a supreme example of getting people to connect – was to organise for the country to host the International Congress of Entomology (ICE). She started in 1996 to mobilise support from the Society to bid for hosting the congress, and in 2004 she successfully bid for hosting the congress on behalf of the Society. Many of you will remember the very successful congress held in Durban in 2008. Shirley was an important member of the executive committee for this congress and worked tirelessly to make it a success. The congress was thoroughly enjoyed and the science appreciated by local and international entomologists. All the work Shirley put towards getting ICE to Durban and her interactions with the members of the Council of International Congresses of Entomology resulted in her being elected to join this Council. She served on this Council until 2016, the only South African to do so. Her participation in the duties of the Council was appreciated and acknowledged. Through her interactions with Council members she became well known in the international entomological community.

To thank Shirley for her contribution to the Society and entomology in South Africa, she was



elected as an honorary member of the Society in 2008. At the AGM in 2019, it was announced that in future the travel grant awards offered by ICE2008 would be known as the 'Shirley Hanrahan Memorial Grant'. Shirley was instrumental in setting up these awards and wanted to help young scientists start their careers, so the naming of the award was a fitting tribute to Shirley. She was delighted to meet with the recipients of this award at ICE in Orlando in 2016 and see personally how they were benefiting from attending the congress.

Apart from working as a high school teacher for four years after obtaining her honours degree and Transvaal Teachers Higher Diploma in 1959, Shirley worked for the rest of her life at the University of the Witwatersrand, and continued there after retirement. She started her scientific career as a research assistant to the famous embryologist, Prof. Boris Balinsky, working on the electron microscope for her Master's degree. As a qualified scientific assistant she was employed by the Department of Physics to run the electron microscope unit. Marriage and babies intervened and she resigned from this post in 1968. In 1970 Shirley joined the Department of Zoology as a temporary lecturer and she obtained her Ph.D. in 1979. In 1994 she was appointed as Head of the Department of Zoology. Six years later she oversaw the combining of the Departments of Zoology and Botany into one School. She was the first Head of the School of Animal, Plant and Environmental Sciences, and continued in this position for four years until her retirement. In recognition of her contribution to teaching biology to first-year students, and to biology in general, an award in her name is given to a deserving student for

progress and academic merit in a first-year biology course at the Faculty of Science annual prize-giving ceremony. After her retirement, Shirley continued with her research and was involved in mentoring young emerging academics and post-graduate students.

At the start of her research, Shirley focused on locusts with a special interest in one of their parasites, *Malamoeba locustae*, a possible biological control agent for the African migratory locust. From there she moved on to research animals in arid environments, contributing to the extensive knowledge on Namib Desert tenebrionid beetles. Her most recent studies concerned the brown locust and the unique properties of the eggs that are able to survive long dry periods in the soil and with the onset of rain, hatch into large swarms. She also contributed to efforts to predict locust outbreaks. She graduated many M.Sc. and Ph.D. students. Right to the end she maintained her involvement in entomological research, with publications on brown locust respiration appearing in 2018 and fog and fauna of the Namib Desert in 2020.

In February 2018, Shirley lost her brave battle with cancer, leaving her husband Prof. Hu Hanrahan, daughter Anne and son Paul, daughter-in-law Yvonne and two grandchildren Amelia and Farron. We, and the rest of the entomological community, lost a good friend and colleague.

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