

OBITUARY

**RONALD WILLIAM HODGES, 1934–2017: EMINENT LEPIDOPTERIST AND  
GREAT MENTOR**

Ronald William Hodges was a Research Scientist with the Systematic Entomology Laboratory (SEL), U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) at the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), Smithsonian Institution (SI) where he was Curator of the Cossioidea, Gelechioidea, Sphingoidea, Tortricodea, and Yponomeutoidea of the National Museum of Natural History collection. He was married to the inimitable Elaine R. S. Hodges (Fig. 1), who was editor of *The Guild Handbook of Scientific Illustration*. Ron and Elaine were partners in every sense of the word during the 39 years they were married. Elaine, highly renowned for her illustrations, provided some of the illustrations for Ron's work. Elaine generously critiqued my moth genitalia illustrations for my dissertation. Also, when I was a graduate student I had the great honor of carpooling for 3 years to the museum with them while Elaine sat in the back seat editing the handbook. I learned a lot about editing with Elaine's questions, Ron's answers, and/or their back and forth discussions on a particular editorial point.

Ron went to Michigan State University for his Bachelor's and Master of Science degrees (1952–1957). In 1957, he enrolled at Cornell University with a major in Systematic Entomology and minors in Insect Ecology and Invertebrate Paleontology. Ron wrote about his professor, Dr. John (Jack) G. Franclemont: "Jack was a true mentor to his students and thus provided guidance, challenges, and encouragement. He never expected them to agree with him but rather relished the differences and anticipated independence

of thought" (Hodges 1992). Dr. Don Davis, a microlepidopterist at the NMNH, recently said to me: "Ron and I were both students of John Franclemont about the same time. I arrived at Cornell (Sept 1956) about a year earlier. George Ball, Lloyd Knutson, Don Anderson, Charles Triplehorn, and Ollie Flint were also at Cornell University at about the same time."

After Ron finished his PhD at Cornell University, he was awarded a three-year National Science Foundation Junior Post-doctoral Fellowship, although it was cut short because in 1962 he was hired as a Research Entomologist by the USDA, Agriculture Research Service (ARS), to conduct research on gelechiid moths. In 1962 Ron also published his dissertation entitled "A revision of the Cosmopterigidae of America North of Mexico, with a definition of the Momphidae and Walshiidae (Lepidoptera: Gelechioidea)." In 1968, the NMNH lepidopterists hosted the Lepidopterists' Society Meeting (Fig. 2). He was the SEL Location Leader at the NMNH from 1973 to 1976 and Research Leader (or Laboratory Chief as they were called then) of the laboratory from 1976 to 1979. He supervised 27 scientists and managed a multi-million dollar budget to conduct systematic entomology research on insects and mites with staff in Washington, D.C., and Beltsville, Maryland. In addition to the daily running of the laboratory, Ron recognized that computerization of the immense data that were held by the laboratory was necessary. In 1978–82, he started a project to develop a "computer stored-and-accessed database" on fruit fly literature (Hodges and Foote 1982), in 1982 he led SEL in the



Figs. 1–2. 1, Ron and Elaine Hodges, ~2005. 2, The attendees of the 1968 Lepidopterists' Society Meeting held at the NMNH. Ron Hodges is third from the right on the first row. Other attendees are Alvah Peterson (2nd row far left), Charles Remington, H. B. D. Kettlewell, Howard Hinton (1st row, 2nd, 3rd, 4th from the left), Roy Kendall (2nd row, above Ron), Connie Kendall (to the left of Roy), others include Donald Weisman, Paul Opler, Art Shapiro, Jerry Powell, J. F. Gates Clarke, Julian Donahue, Charlie Covell, Don Davis, Fred Stehr, Alexander Klots, and John Burns.

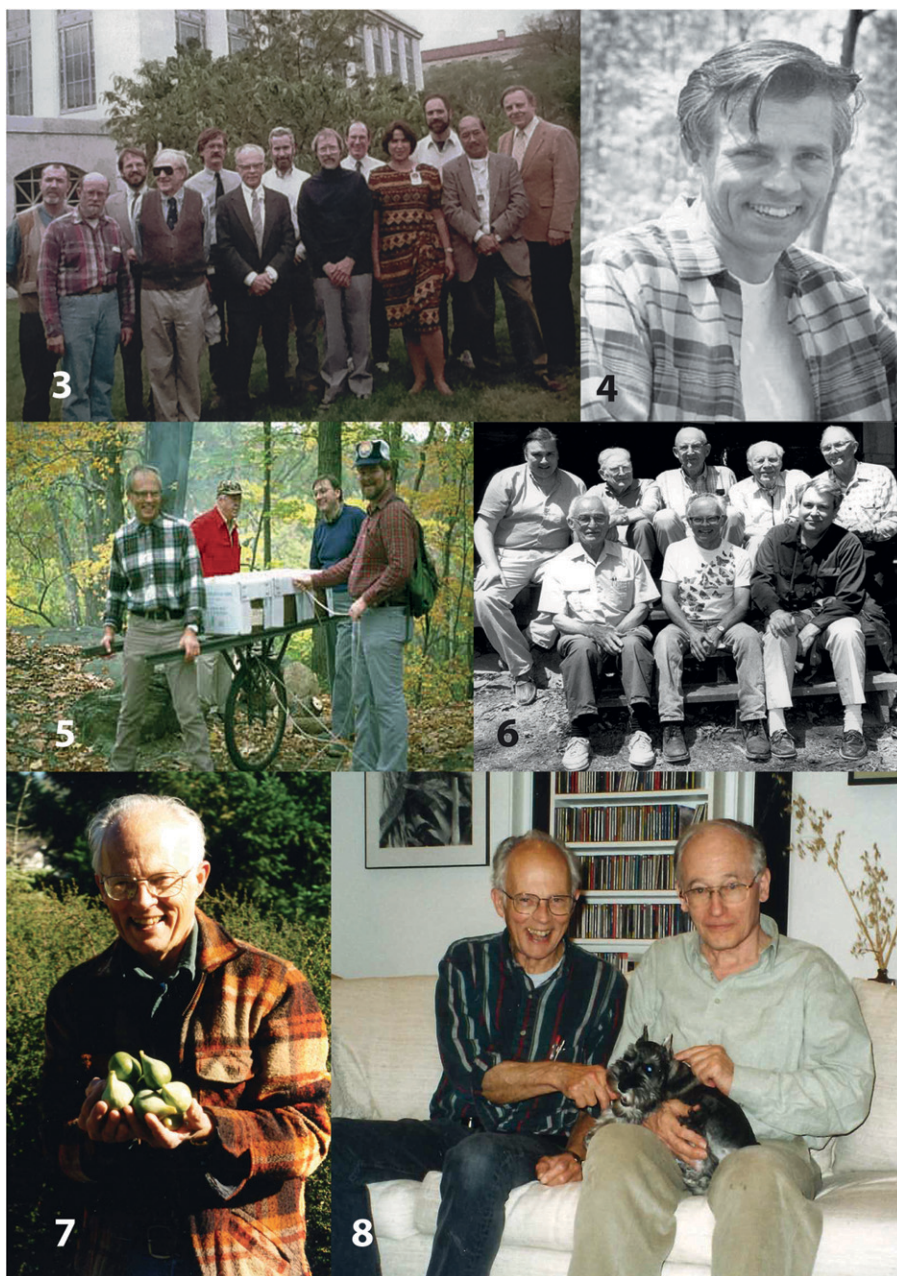
development of a standardized format for taxonomic cataloging, and in the early 1990's he led a major internal project to develop an "authority file for the terrestrial arthropods of the world" (BIOTA as it was known internally) (Hodges 1993) that was later transferred to the Interagency Taxonomic Information System (ITIS).

When Ron stepped down as Research Leader of SEL in 1980, he became Unit Leader of the Lepidoptera/Heteroptera Research Unit until his retirement in 1997 (Fig. 3). He was instrumental in hiring the SEL lepidopterists for almost three decades. And he was instrumental in my training at the University of Maryland at College Park and hiring during this time. In 1986, he petitioned Dr. Doug Miller, the SEL Research Leader at the time, that I be hired to sort the larval Lepidoptera backlog to be distributed to the SEL lepidopterists. I was hired for three years as a half-time Entomologist to learn about larval morphology and curation of the adult pyraloid collection while I finished my dissertation. During this time, Ron also led the combined SEL/SI lepidopterists, focusing mostly on major issues regarding the NMNH Lepidoptera National Collection, from building the first list of curator responsibilities for moth families to the development of the first profiles for the collection in the 1990s. I remember standing or sitting in his office, depending on how long he thought the meeting was going to be, in Hall 30, the old exhibit hall where the Lepidoptera collection was formerly housed, with either the SEL Lepidopterists or all the Lepidopterists discussing an issue. Ron was very efficient with words and ran very efficient meetings; something was always accomplished. I learned two lessons from Ron regarding meetings: only hold meetings when necessary and keep to the agenda, with flexibility if needed.

He also reviewed proposals on systematic biology for the National Science Foundation from 1965–1995, and in 1984 on entomology for the Agency for International Development. He was on the ARS Research Grade Evaluation Committee and the Systematics-Taxonomy Peer Group. He chaired the former committee and developed criteria to nominate candidates for the first set of ARS awards.

@The LepSoc (The Lepidopterists' Society) recently tweeted "The passing of a giant" in reference to Ron Hodges. Ron conducted research on the systematics of the Lepidoptera, particularly the superfamilies Gelechioidea and Sphingoidea, for 45 years. Gelechioid moths are herbivores, many are serious pests, and some are used as biological control agents. These moths are difficult to collect and handle because of their delicacy and small size, many having a wing length of only 10–15 mm. As a result, they had been neglected by most field workers. He published the first higher-level cladistic analysis of the world Gelechioidea, which represented the first attempt to understand the relationships among all 38 familial and subfamilial taxa. His final major work, published after he left government service, on the gelechiid moth genus *Chionodes*, was monumental. He examined over 19,000 specimens, each specimen with a wing length of less than 10 mm. The work covered 187 species in America north of Mexico, and included 115 new species. Elaine Hodges provided the stunningly beautiful, clean pen and ink illustrations. His lifetime work represents a pioneering effort that resulted in significant advances in knowledge about these moths worldwide. He was recognized throughout the world as one of the foremost experts on American Gelechioidea and the higher classification of the Gelechioidea worldwide, and as a major worker on the New World Sphingidae or sphinx moths.





Figs. 3–8. 3, The NMNH lepidopterists in the late 1990s. Ron Hodges is on the first row, 3rd from left. Back row, left to right, David Adamski, Marc Epstein, Donald Harvey, Mike Pogue, John Brown, Robert Robbins, Don Davis. Front row, left to right, Jon “Buck” Lewis, Doug Ferguson, Ron Hodges, John Burns, Alma Solis, and Vichai Malikul (who took the photograph). 4, Ron Hodges on Plummers Island, early 1960’s. 5, Ron Hodges with other WBFC members carting the shad up to the cabin on Plummers Island for cooking, early 1980s. 6, WBFC Past Presidents in front of the cabin. Ron is on the first row, center. Karl Krombein, SI hymenopterist, to his left, early 1990s. 7, Ron Hodges with figs from his garden, Eugene, Oregon, 2001 (photo by Edith Sattler). 8, Ron Hodges and Klaus Sattler (and Peppi), two great gelechioidologists, at Ron and Elaine’s house, Eugene, Oregon, 2001 (photo by Edith Sattler).

He published on 117 genera (21 new), 806 species (351 new), 36 subfamilies (7 new), and 16 families (7 new) in these studies. He published seventy-three papers, including six book-length research papers. He was awarded the Karl Jordan Medal in 1997 from the Lepidopterists' Society for his work on Gelechioidea. He was a co-founder and editor of the outstanding monographic series on North American moths, *The Moths of America North of Mexico*. This series unlocked the identity and biologies of moths in the United States, and generated more interest by professionals and amateurs in moths across the country. Ron wrote the first fascicle of this series, about sphinx moths. Elaine provided the Lepidoptera morphology illustrations for this volume which have been used by many students of moths. He also initiated and was the general editor of a multi-authored checklist of over 11,000 species names of Lepidoptera in American north of Mexico that was published in 1983. Additionally, he was editor-in-chief of the publication series and managing director of the Wedge Entomological Research Foundation that still publishes the series. In 1990, Ron deservedly received the Thomas Say Award from the Entomological Society of America for the *Moths of America North of Mexico* series. Ron corresponded with a diverse group of entomologists, including Dr. Klaus Sattler, Curator of the Gelechioidea at The Natural History Museum, London, who wrote: "Ron was a valued scientific colleague and good friend of ours (his spouse, Edith Sattler) for very many years, and we have happy memories of him, as also of Elaine. Ron and I were of similar age; we had graduated at about the same time, worked life-long on the same groups of moths and naturally had regular correspondence. We became personally acquainted over fifty years ago here in London as we both for

the first time visited the world-famous British Museum." The Ronald W. Hodges Papers (1960–1997), consisting of his extensive correspondence, can be found on the Smithsonian Institution Archives website: [https://siarchives.si.edu/collections/siris\\_arc\\_229245](https://siarchives.si.edu/collections/siris_arc_229245).

At the NMNH, he was curator of many micro-moth collections, which consisted of about 200,000–300,000 specimens. He made a major addition and contribution to the development of the National Insect Collection by personally collecting and spreading a staggering 65,000 moths from critical geographic areas in the United States. It is well known that Jack Franclemont ensured his students maintained a high "level of quality in spread specimens and genital preparations [that] set new standards. . ." (Hodges 1992). Jack would take his students to collect in Arizona during the summer, and in 1961 Ron wrote a paper on three new species of Oecophoridae that he collected in Arizona. He wrote: "Approximately 35,000 moths were collected and spread during the 1959 season: of these about 15,000 were Microlepidoptera, with the Gelechiidae and Blastobasidae predominating. I am gradually working up the Gelechioidea, . . ." Later during his tenure at the NMNH, he and Dr. Doug Ferguson, a geometroid specialist in SEL and NMNH, would travel west to states that were not represented in the NMNH collection (Hodges 2004). Doug collected the macrolepidoptera and Ron the microlepidoptera. Dr. Jean-François Landry, Curator of Gelechioidea, Canadian National Collection, who had been working on beetles, writes: "In 1981 Ron invited me to join him and Doug Ferguson in the field in Colorado to see how he conducted his field collecting and specimen spreading. I drove from Edmonton, Alberta to Buena Vista, Colorado, and spent a few days watching

and learning from him. Ron would direct me to sites where he and Doug had particularly good collecting. One morning he recommended that I go up to Cottonwood Pass (12,000 ft) for a breathtaking view of the region. I collected a few micros in the alpine zone, and upon my return, I showed Ron my small catch and he was surprised at one species of Gelechiidae that I found up there ("I'll be damned, this is *Lita virgella*!" he said). So the next day, he went up to the alpine zone himself and returned with an amazing catch of assorted micros, including an undescribed scythrid (I was going to do my thesis on this group) which made me envious: Ron said he found them running on the ground and hiding under rocks. As a new student of these moths, it made me realize what an experienced microlepidopterist could find. Recently, I studied some of the specimens he found at Cottonwood Pass on that day, including an undescribed Plutellidae, more than 35 years after he collected them. These specimens do have a very special significance for me."

Ron was a member of many professional societies: American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Association for Zoological Nomenclature, American Entomological Society, Entomological Society of America, Entomological Society of Canada, Entomological Society of Ontario, Entomological Society of Washington, Michigan Entomological Society, The Lepidoptera Research Foundation, The Lepidopterists' Society, Maryland Entomological Society, Sigma Xi, Society of Systematic Biology, Washington Biologists' Field Club, Ohio Lepidopterists, Northwest Lepidoptera Society, and Societas Europaea Lepidopterologica. He served in many capacities and on many committees within most of these societies, including Secretary for the Society of

Systematic Biology. He was elected President of the American Association for Zoological Nomenclature (1993), The Lepidopterists' Society (1975–76), Maryland Entomological Society (1973–74), and the Washington Biologists' Field Club (1976–79). One day, I walked into his office as he was hanging up the phone. He told me that he was asked to run for President of The Biological Society of Washington, a society that he was not even a member of! He said he politely declined.

Notably, Ron and Elaine were founding members of the Maryland Entomological Society. He was the first Editor of The Maryland Entomologist, and Elaine was President of the society when the second issue appeared. Ron joined the Entomological Society of Washington in 1960. He was a life member and was made an Honorary Member in 1998. The Washington Biologists' Field Club (WBFC), one of the oldest science societies in the United States, was incorporated in 1902. Ron was elected as a member in 1963, and as President in 1976. Lowell Adams, in a recent email to the WBFC membership, said: "Ron was an active member in the Washington Biologists' Field Club before retiring and moving to Oregon. He was a past president and potato cooker." There are two events at Plummers Island during the year, an Oyster Roast and a Shad Bake. There is a wood-burning stove where Ron for many years cooked the potatoes in the same manner as it was done more than a hundred years ago (Figs. 4–6). He wrote his biography for the WBFC website (<https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/resshow/perry/bios/HodgesRonald.htm>). In 1996, Ron nominated me to be a member in the WBFC. The society had only recently voted to increase the membership to 60 and accept females for membership. He had asked me about this, and I suggested to him



that it might be better to have a number of women come into the club at the same time, rather than having a lone female member. He was well aware of the issues I had as a woman in the field and provided sound advice when I asked.

Ron was very generous to students. He sponsored students for summer work at the NMNH, for example, including a student from the University of Arkansas to work on Tortricidae and Pterophoridae, and he suggested thesis problems in the Gelechioidea for Dr. David Adamski (retired SEL, SI) on the Blastobasidae and Dr. Jean-François Landry (CNC) on the Scythrididae. Dr. Jean-François Landry had just been hired to work on microlepidoptera systematics at the Canadian National Collection in 1981. "Ron telephoned me and invited me to travel to Washington, D.C. so he could provide initial guidance. Ron and Elaine invited me to stay at their house in Adelphi, Maryland, for the entire week, and I commuted with them to the museum every day. They welcomed me warmly and treated me like a son. They even organized a welcome party at their house one night, placing small invitation posters in the entomology (Lepidoptera) hall which read something like "Come and join us to welcome our new Canadian colleague microlepidopterist." For me as a young graduate student who did not even know the first thing about his newly adopted field of endeavor, this was simply amazing. I felt like I was being welcomed into a new family. Ron shared generously his vast knowledge of microlepidoptera with me." Also in 1981, Ron sponsored me for a Smithsonian Institution summer internship to work on Lepidoptera from northeastern Mexico, the subject of my Master's thesis at the University of Texas at Austin. Ron proposed that I work on pyraloids for my Ph.D. and when I decided

to do so, it was Ron that suggested and organized my first meeting with Dr. Eugene (Gene) Munroe in 1982. Although Doug Ferguson was officially on my PhD committee, Ron and the other lepidopterists were always available to answer my innumerable questions about Lepidoptera classification, morphology and ecology. Ron was my curation and morphology "go to" person in order to spread the questions around.

Looking back, my first visit to the NMNH was in 1977, for three days, and that is when I first met Ron Hodges. To me it was the most amazing three days and I can truly say that I am in Lepidoptera systematics because of Ron Hodges. Richard Brown (Mississippi State University, also a Jack Franclemont student), who was in residence at NMNH at the time, introduced me to all the lepidopterists, and later came by to tell me that Ron Hodges would like to speak with me. I distinctly remember Ron asking me if I had ever thought of going into systematics, and then he spent at least two hours telling me what the field required and what schools I could go to and who I could study with! He showed me material that he had collected and I said: "it looks like a machine prepared them!" It was many years before I realized that Ron was thorough about everything he did and he considered my comment about his specimens a compliment because each specimen was indeed exquisitely and precisely prepared. It was also later that I realized that Ron was honest, forthright, and supportive, but also very logical about every conversation, every decision. He was fair and treated everyone with respect. Although he was very serious most of the time, he also had a sense of humor. Ron was my mentor from the very start, but he was also my role model. All the tools that I learned from him would later make me

the successful scientist and the Research Leader that I was to become in future years. In retrospect, I was very lucky that I was interested in moths and visited the NMNH that year. All of the moth lepidopterists, Ron, Doug, Don, and Dr. Robert Poole, a macrolepidopterist at the NMNH, were tough, and set the bar high, but were very supportive. They were all students of Jack Franclemont at Cornell University.

I was often invited to Ron and Elaine's house for dinner; they kept a card index of what guests wouldn't or couldn't eat! Ron and Elaine were gourmet cooks, who also introduced me to wine tastings. They also participated in a gourmet club with a number of other scientists from SEL and NMNH who would take turns at different homes and prepare gourmet meals. They were fans of opera and would leave the office early to have a gourmet dinner in Georgetown before the opera at the Kennedy Center. Ron spent his spare time tending to his orchids and working on their garden. Ron and Elaine had two sons, Larry and Steve.

Ron and Elaine retired to Eugene, Oregon, where they built their house. Ron would show me the architectural plans and occasionally bring in photographs of the work being done on their new house across the country. He told me that, besides being close to their grandchildren on the west coast of the U.S., he would have a garden with about 250 growing days! Klaus and Edith Sattler visited them in Oregon in 2001. Klaus writes: "Edith and I were on the first leg of a round-the-world tour, only days after the 9/11 attacks in New York. Everybody was jittery, security was extremely tight and the greatest threat to the free world seemed to be nail scissors in one's luggage. We stopped over for a few memorable days with Ron and Elaine in Oregon in their marvelous new house, enjoyed the garden, the orchids, wonderful

local bird life, the rugged Oregon coastline and, above all, their company (and that of their amusing little dog Peppi) (Figs. 7–8). We did not realize at the time that it would be our last ever meeting. A few years later Ron wanted to take Elaine to London, something she had always wished, and we had already made arrangements for hosting them part of the time. But then the trip had to be cancelled at very short notice because Elaine's condition became critical. Sadly, she should never make it to London, nor did Ron ever come again."

I really missed Ron and Elaine when they left for the West Coast. Elaine passed away in 2006 after a long battle with breast cancer. I last saw Ron in 2016 when I was invited to give a workshop on pyraloids at Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon. He still had a twinkle in his eye! That twinkle went out on December 10th, 2017 at his home in Eugene, Oregon. Ron was 83 years old.

### **Publications by Ronald William Hodges (1934–2016)**

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