



PRESS RELEASE

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BC entomologist receives national award from Canadian museum network

OTTAWA – Dr. Robert Cannings, a respected scientist who has devoted his career to the study of entomology (insects), is the distinguished recipient this year of the Bruce Naylor Award. This national award, presented by the Alliance of Natural History Museums of Canada (ANHMC), recognizes exceptional contributions to the study of museum-based natural history in Canada.

Dr. Cannings' contributions as a biologist go back decades, from his early days as a naturalist and nature interpreter, to his 29 years as Curator of Entomology at the Royal BC Museum (RBCM) in Victoria. He has authored several books, published more than 100 peer-reviewed scientific articles and written over 100 popular articles. Under his curatorship, the RBCM's entomology collection has grown from a few thousand specimens to the present day collection of over 250,000. He has also written text for, and contributed to the planning of, a wide range of museum exhibits.

While he publishes on many kinds of insects, his research focuses on the diversity and evolution of dragonflies and robber flies. Books that he has authored or co-authored include *The Dragonflies of British Columbia* (1977), *The World of Fresh Water* (1998), *Introducing the Dragonflies of British Columbia and the Yukon* (2002) and *The Systematics of Lasiopogon (Diptera: Asilidae)* (2002).

He joined forces with his brothers, biologists Sydney and Richard, to produce *Birds of the Okanagan Valley* (1987), and his artistic talents were put to use to illustrate the White-headed Woodpeckers on the book's cover.

For many years he has served on the executive of the Entomological Society of British Columbia and was editor of the ESBC newsletter *Boreus* (which he started in 1981) until 1991. He is a member of the Arthropod Subcommittee of COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada) and the British Columbia Invertebrate Recovery Team. He has also been active on the Scientific Committee of the Biological Survey of Canada (Terrestrial Arthropods)

"The thing that I've always tried to do is be broad in my interests, rather than always simply focusing on particular research and collections projects," says Dr. Cannings. "I've tried to be a bit of everything. I like to think this award recognizes that versatility."

Periodically he teaches at the University of Victoria and has brought fourth-year students into the RBCM's labs to give them direct exposure to the kind of work done by museum biologists.

"I have never known anyone so well-rounded and devoted", says Mr. Kelly Sendall, Manager of Natural History at Royal BC Museum. "In my mind he is the epitome of what a curator in a natural history museum should be."

Cannings grew up in Penticton in the Okanagan Valley. His father was the photographer for the Agriculture Canada research station in Summerland. The young Cannings frequently hung around with the scientists. An amateur biologist, his father often took the family to the Penticton museum, and at times they would donate things they found in nature to the museum.

"I was a museum kid long before I ever came here," says Cannings. "Natural history and collecting were part of our life."



Cannings recalls that his family had a long shelf of natural history books, including handbooks produced by the RBCM (formerly the British Columbia Provincial Museum). Even at a young age, one of his ambitions was to write a museum handbook. His goal was realized with *The Dragonflies of British Columbia*, which was published before he joined the museum in 1980.

In 2008, the Okanagan University College recognized Dr. Cannings and his two brothers as Honorary Fellows for their contributions to the appreciation of nature through their writings, professional activities and dedication.

The Bruce Naylor Award is named for the former director of the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology. Deceased in 2007, Dr. Naylor had also served as president of the ANHMC. The award will be presented at a special reception of the ANHMC on October 27, 2009 in The Speaker's Reception Room in the Centre Block of Parliament Hill, Ottawa.

Created in 2003, the ANHMC now has 16 members from coast to coast. Its goal is to increase visibility of Canada's natural history museums, which are responsible for preserving precious collections of millions of specimens that are the record of our natural heritage. The network strives to build capacity in the areas of scientific research, collections development and education about the natural environment, for the greater benefit of all Canadians.

Members

- *Canadian Museum of Nature
- *Muséums Nature de Montreal
- *New Brunswick Museum
- *Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History
- *Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre
- *Royal Alberta Museum
- *Royal British Columbia Museum
- Royal Ontario Museum
- *Royal Saskatchewan Museum
- *Royal Tyrrell Museum
- *The Manitoba Museum
- *The Rooms Provincial Museum
- Vancouver Aquarium
- *Yukon Beringia Interpretive Centre

Associate Members

- Redpath Museum
- Toronto Zoo

- * Founding members

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