

## **ALBERT SCHWARTZ (1923 – 1992)**

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On October 18, 1992, Albert Schwartz died quietly in a hospital in Miami as result of injuries sustained in a fall at his home on the night of 8 October. With the passing of Al Schwartz, an era of adventure and discovery in the West Indies came to an end. More than any single person (including Gundlach, Poey, Barbour, or Bond), Al's name has become associated with West Indian zoology. For nearly 40 years he devoted his life to discovering, documenting, and describing the butterflies, frogs, reptiles, birds, and mammals of the islands he cherished.

Schwartz was born on 13 September 1923 in Cincinnati, Ohio. He attended private schools in Cincinnati and, by the time he was in graduate school, both of his parents had passed away. He received his B.S. (Psychology) in 1944 from the University of Cincinnati, his M.S. (Zoology) in 1946 from the University of Miami, and his Ph.D. in 1952 from the University of Michigan (dissertation topic: "Mammals of southern Florida and the upper Florida keys"). Considering the topics he chose for his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees, the fact that he made his most significant contributions in the study of butterflies, amphibians, and reptiles is all the more amazing.

Most of his professional career was spent teaching at Miami-Dade Community College (1967-1988). He was not allocated time for research at Miami-Dade, and his free time was jealously guarded. Al was a life-long bachelor who avoided having distractions inflicted upon him by others. Unexpected visitors to his home were not welcome, especially in his later years when getting around his house was difficult due to chronic arthritis. On the other hand, he enjoyed social interactions on his terms: one-on-one or small groups, and usually at his home. On the occasions that my wife, Rose, and I visited him he was warm, hospitable, and physically affectionate (especially with Rose). He held court in his study, offered us coke or beer, and then wanted details of our field work. He lived a lifestyle that, I am sure, was beyond the comprehension of most, but it was the style he chose and I am certain that he had few regrets about his choices. I once asked him if he ever felt lonely, and he replied, "I am often alone, but I never feel lonely."

Schwartz frequently collaborated with other biologists, most notably Richard Thomas (University of Puerto Rico-Rio Piedras) and Orlando Garrido of Cuba. I found him to be an ideal collaborator and we worked over the telephone and by mail. No major decisions were made without discussion; he welcomed constructive criticism (and offered it whether asked or not), and when he told me something would be in the mail on a particular day, I knew it would be. While working on a large project, we spoke on the telephone nearly every day, and, perhaps more than anything, I miss being able to call Al to share a discovery or to ask his advice regarding some herpetological problem.

Al was devoted to studying the fauna of the West Indies. Cuba was the site of Al's initiation to West Indian field work in 1954, and that island remained his favorite. When Cuba became inaccessible, he quickly turned his attention to Hispaniola and the rest of the West Indies. He made noteworthy contributions to the biology of all vertebrate groups save fishes.

Al published his first paper on West Indian amphibians and reptiles in 1956. He never looked back. Al was a describer and his output was prodigious; for the West Indies alone he named

three bats, nearly two dozen new butterflies, 83 species of amphibians and reptiles (41 frogs, 37 lizards, and 5 snakes) and about 279 subspecies of amphibians and reptiles (24 frogs, 223 lizards, and 32 snakes).

One of the great ironies of Al's life, was that after he retired from Miami-Dade (1988), he had ample time to devote to field work, but his arthritic knees prevented him from doing so.

Within two years he became virtually housebound. I never got the impression that he felt sorry for himself, and the last years of his life were his most productive: *Amphibians and Reptiles of the West Indies: Descriptions, Distributions, and Natural History* (1991; 720 pp.).

Al once submitted a proposal to NSF indicating that he would do a herpetological survey of the entire West Indies, making collections, describing new taxa, and addressing taxonomic problems for virtually all genera of West Indian amphibians and reptiles. One reviewer deemed the proposal preposterous in its scale and it was rejected by NSF. As anyone familiar with West Indian herpetology will attest, preposterous as it may have been, Al did do it. All zoologists working in the West Indies, today and far into the future, owe him a debt of gratitude. Al's 230 papers (totaling about 5,100 published pages) comprise a legacy of thorough, descriptive research that will remain significant and an inspiration for decades to come.



*Editor's Note:*

I never had the pleasure of meeting Al Schwartz in person, although I was fortunate to have had a number of long telephone conversations with him. He was always friendly and cordial, generous with his time, and thoughtful in his answers to my multitude of questions. Early in our first conversation Dr. Schwartz stopped me from formally addressing him by saying, "call me Al." Al was an amazing source of information on very obscure locales in the West Indies and he generously shared his vast knowledge with me. He seemed to have visited every island in the region, and in fact the only West Indian island that I questioned him about that he had not been to was Navassa, which is one of the most remote places in the world. The only questions he declined to answer were of a strictly ecological nature and he would remind me, "I'm a taxonomist not an ecologist."

Although he was not optimistic about the future of the region, he was careful never to discourage my enthusiasm in any way. He was most supportive of the formation of the International Iguana Society and became one of our earliest members. His compliments on *Iguana Times* were a great encouragement to us. He reminded us that any protection we could get for iguanas anywhere would also protect the other herpetological fauna in the habitat. I tried to contact Al and was unsuccessful. I knew his south Miami home was near the north end of the destruction and I wondered how much he was affected by the storm. I was shocked to find out in early 1993 that he had died in October. I felt loss and sadness that I would no longer be able to call my friend. I would no longer be able to share my adventure or discovery with the great discoverer. Each conversation with Al Schwartz was an education, a treat, and a memorable experience. I deeply regret that our conversations will be no more.

*Robert W. Ehrig*