



OBITUARY

Jacques Pierre Marie Daudin (1926–2011)

Fr. Mark de Silva

Mayreau, The Grenadines

Jacques was born in China on 30 October 1926 to Marie-Louise and Pierre Daudin, a French Ambassador, who would author the famous Manchurian-French dictionary. Jacques' very early education began in 1931 in China and ended in Vietnam, where he attended school in Ho Chi Minh City with his childhood friend Norodom Sihanouk, the King of Cambodia. When the Japanese invaded French Indochina, Jacques was captured and spent six months as a Japanese prisoner-of-war in 1945. He then spent the following year fighting on the side of his new Vietnamese friends, the Viet Minh, in the first Vietnam War, before returning to France to continue his education.

Jacques completed his education in Tropical Agronomy at the University of Nancy in France, and graduated in 1949 with an MD in Agronomic Science. Jacques married Monique Landreat after his graduation, and his first and only child, Sylvie, was born in Martinique four years later. He left the following year for Africa, where he did his first of many research projects on bananas at the Research Station of Kindia in Guinea. After one year of research in Africa, he returned to France, but on his way back to France in December 1950, the DCK (UAT) plane in which he was flying crashed in Bordeaux, France, killing 44 passengers. Jacques was the only survivor.

Jacques left France the following year for Guadeloupe, where he worked at the Banana Research Station from 1951 to 1953. He then moved to the Banana Research Station in Martinique, and stayed there until 1959. Here in Martinique, he was credited with the discovery of a special oil-based spray that was used to control the Sigatoga disease in bananas. For a short time, Jacques was a consultant with the Mobil Oil Company, where he invented a product to protect ripening bananas (the ubiquitous blue plastic bags in banana plantations) that is still used today. He then went to revolutionary Cuba, where he continued work on bananas and plantains at the Institute Nationale Research Agronomic. Che Guevara was the acting Minister of Agriculture at the time. For a short time in 1960, he was a guest of the United Fruit Company at their Dunlap Research Laboratory in Honduras.

In 1961, Jacques created a banana spraying company that he called SATAIR. He had three spray planes that worked in Martinique, St Lucia, and Dominica. While he ran his spray-



ing business, he also did consulting work for the Dominica Bananas Growers Association, for WINBAN (West Indian Banana Growers Association) in St. Lucia, for the Port Maria Banana Growers Association in Jamaica, and in 1966 for the Chevron Chemical Co., when he was a guest at the phytopharmaceutical symposium in London. Jacques also worked for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago controlling an invasion of locusts, and in 1975 he did some rice-spraying surveys in Guyana and Suriname.

The first plane to land at the Union Island (Grenadines) airport, in 1974, was one of Jacques SATAIR planes. SATAIR was not only an agricultural enterprise — it also became a civil transport business with a DC3 and BN2 islander planes. SATAIR eventually became Air Martinique. It was from these early flying visits that Jacques soon fell in love with Union Island, and in 1977 he decided to settle and build a small hotel resort here while living in Ashton. Jacques bought a piece of

land close to the Anchorage Hotel in 1978, but the property was sold to him with a false title deed and he lost everything except the house in which he continued to live for the remainder of his life. In 1980, Jacques bought Bloody Bay but sold it five years later because the area was much too inaccessible.

Jacques continued to do agricultural spraying work and in 1981, he set up a rice-spraying company in French Guiana. In 1983, the government of Cameroon in Africa employed him to make a full survey of their banana industry, and he completed this work in four months. In his final report, he also included the serious effects of official corruption that was destroying their industry. The Cameroon government did not like this and he therefore became “*persona non grata*” in that country.

Jacques’ first grandchild, Sebastien, was born in Martinique in 1983, and six years later came his second grandchild, Pierre-Gilles. He was always happy to receive these grandchildren in Union Island where he taught them about the sea and how to fish. Jacques started fishing with

local fishermen in 1983. They were the first local crew to fish at a depth of 50 fathoms with nets, palangs, and big deep-water fish pots on a well-equipped boat. The boat, however, caught fire and burned in Clifton Harbor in 1987, and Jacques gave up fishing. He decided to rent the Sunny Grenadines Restaurant to improve the local tourism industry, and he did this quite successfully until 1991.

Jacques eventually became seriously concerned with the destruction of Union Island’s natural environment and he began teaching the children and others to care for their natural and cultural heritage. He began as a voluntary teacher of science and the environment at the Union Island Secondary School from 1993, but was soon “fired” from this non-paying job because of his vocal environmental stance. He later formed the UIAEP (Union Island Association for Ecological Protection) and began a campaign to protect Union Island’s environment. Protecting the natural environment in these small islands is very difficult when the government does



The Union Island Gecko (*Gonatodes daudini*), known only from Union Island and named for Jacques: “The specific epithet is a patronym honoring Jacques Daudin. “Jack,” now 80 years old, arrived on Union 27 years ago and has been documenting its natural history ever since. An ardent conservationist, he has fought many battles in order to protect the island’s natural resources, and he recently compiled and edited A Natural History Monograph of Union Island (from Powell and Henderson. 2005. A new species of *Gonatodes* (Squamata: Gekkonidae) from the West Indies. *Caribbean Journal of Science* 41:709–715).

not appear to care and, in fact, often contributes directly by its policies to its destruction. Jacques made his voice heard when he thought that the extension of the airport could have been done in a more environmentally friendly manner; he protested against the Italian Ashton Lagoon Marina project that had plans to completely destroy the mangroves; and he protested when the government and his personal and close friend the prime minister tried to hand over the Tobago Cays Marine Park to the Palm Island Resort.

Jacques' last big accomplishment was in 2000, when, after working for almost 24 years, he published his first book, *A Socio-political History of Union Island*. This very important book soon sold out, and he revised and reprinted it in 2011. Jacques also published another book, *A Natural History Monograph of Union Island*, in 2003, and this book also has been completely sold out. Jacques was thrilled when in 2005 scientists named a new species of lizard after him (*Gonatodes daudini*). This beautiful little lizard is known to occur only on Union Island.

Jacques celebrated his 74th birthday in 2000, and from that year on his health began to deteriorate. He had an opera-

tion to remove a cancerous kidney, and in the same year had two operations on his eyes for retinal displacement. He started to slow down and could not go walking into the bush anymore — something he loved very much, but he still walked into Clifton every day with his straw hat and his dark shades to protect him against the sun. These daily shopping trips were to buy bread and bananas to make breakfast for what he called his “Taliban,” the many “adopted” children for whom he cared deeply.

While visiting St. Vincent early in 2011, Jacques became seriously ill and had to be hospitalized. He was later taken to Martinique, where the doctors gave him five months to live — his cancer was much too advanced for treatment. He immediately returned to his adopted home of Union Island and to his “Taliban,” who cared for him until he died on Saturday, 15 October, 15 days short of his 85th birthday. Jacques remained a committed socialist and a peoples' person all his life, and even though he rose to the heights of fame as a scientist, businessman, and an environmentalist, he never departed from the simple and absolutely committed life of a true Taoist father caring for his many, many adopted children.