



In Memoriam
John L. Cloudsley-Thompson -
1921 -2013
A Leading Biologist



It was with sadness that I and several colleagues learned about the death, at the age of 92, of our friend and venerable colleague Prof. John L. Cloudsley-Thompson.

Professor John Cloudsley-Thompson was born on 23 May 1921, at Murree in India. When World War II broke out he was at boarding school, but already in September 1939 he joined the army. He had, however, two terms at Cambridge before being called up. In August 1941 he sailed round the Cape to North Africa where he served as a tank troop leader in the 7th Armoured Division. His tank was knocked out on May 1942 and John was severely wounded. He was evacuated via South Africa and became a gunnery instructor (Captain) at Sandhurst in 1943. He managed, however, to persuade a Medical Board to upgrade him so that he could rejoin his regiment in time for 'D' day June 1944. - As John explained to me much later, this was 'his first visit to France' -. After World War II John returned to Cambridge with the honorary rank of Captain, where he received the degrees of M.A. and Ph.D. He was awarded the degree of D.Sc. in 1960 in London.

He served as Lecturer in Zoology at King's College, University of London (1950-1960), Professor of Zoology, University of Khartoum and Keeper, Sudan Natural History Museum (1960-1971) and Professor of Zoology at Birkbeck College, University of London (1972-1986).

In recognition of his outstanding achievements, He has been awarded a number of honours: F. I. Biol. And F. W. A. A. S., 1962; Royal African Society Medal, 1969; K. S. S. Charter Award, Institute of Biology, 1981; Honorary D.Sc and Gold Medal, University of Khartoum, 1981; Biological Council Medal, 1985; J. H. Grundy Medal R. A. M. C., 1987; Peter Scott Award, B. N. A., 1993; Fellow Honoris Causa of the Linnean Society, 1997.

John's experience in North Africa awakened his interest in desert biology that lasted throughout his entire career. As he tells in his book 'Desert Life', in Libya, while waiting for the next tank battle, British soldiers made pets of the local fauna. Some adopted Solifugae - typical animals of the desert also known as 'jerrylanders'. John stated that he did not know much about such things at the time, but these creatures aroused his fascination for Arachnids during the following decades.

During the early 1950s and before, very few workers were involved in carrying out long-term research work on desert animals especially in the field. John's research methods were somewhat revolutionary for his time, mainly because he

was capable of setting up very simple but ingenious experiments using inexpensive materials and equipment. His main research interests were devoted to eco-physiology, and in particular the circadian rhythms of several zoological groups of desert organisms, both vertebrates and invertebrates. For this reason he was better classified as a full zoologist, position extremely rare in present days.

Others accomplishments can also illustrate John's scientific career. One was the founding and editing of the 'Journal of Arid Environments' which started in 1978. He was also Editor of the book series 'Adaptations of Desert Organisms'. He published more than 50 books and very numerous scientific articles. Some of his books are well known by the Arachnological Community, such as 'Spider, Scorpions, Centipedes and Mites', first edited in 1958. Many other followed and already at an advanced age, John published most interesting books such as 'Biotic Interactions in Arid Lands' (1996), or 'Teach yourself Ecology' (1998). One of the books I better appreciated was a small volume of only 49 pages, 'Microecology' edited in 1967. Extremely well constructed and didactic, as all the contributions done by John. One of the last books published by John was not, however, about any field of biology. 'Sharpshooter' (2006) tells about his war memories. This period of his life remained strongly marked in his mind, as I could notice in many of the letters he addressed to me in the last months of his life.

My first mail contact with John took place around 1973/1974, while I was yet a young Ph.D. student, working on the ecology of scorpions from the savannah's of South America. We finally met during the 7th International Congress of Arachnology which took place in Exeter, UK in the summer of 1977. In the following years, we met again in Arachnological meetings, but it was only after his retirement from Birkbeck College, University of London that a more intense scientific exchange started between us.

Since 1993 we shared a common interest in many aspects of scorpion reproductive biology, ecology, pattern of distribution and, human interactions with these animals. Scorpions represent one of the most conspicuous zoological groups in deserts and naturally have always fascinated John during his field studies. During these 20 years of close collaboration, I was myself surprised to the fact that we co-authored nearly 50 papers. Most remarkable, however, was to feel the refreshing enthusiasm John could have to each new subject, in the same way a young student would. As stated by Crawford (2001), who also knew John particularly well,

“Some individuals, by force of their personality and intellect are able in unexpected ways to expand the perceptions of other. John, as I was to learn, was one of these...”. I totally agree with Crawford’s feelings.

In 2001, I was very honoured to be invited by Prof. Ishwar Prakash to take part in the ‘Festschrift for Prof. J. L. Cloudsley-Thompson on his 80th Birthday’ (Prakash, 2001). Ten year later, I imagined, once again, to pay homage to John L. Cloudsley-Thompson for the occasion of his 90th Birthday. This becomes possible with the kind assistance of Drs. Victor Fet and Michael Sologlad who accepted to prepare a special issue of the Journal *Euscorpius* (2011) to this celebration. Many authors, kindly accept the invitation to send contributions to this issue and the final result was very successful. When the final volume was send to John on the summer of 2011, he and his wife Anne Cloudsley were deeply touched. John, as attested by several letters he send to me, was really happy with this proof of respect, however, happiness was not to last for long. Anne Cloudsley was very sick by the end of 2011 and she finally died early on 2012. This was a terrible chock for John, after 67 years of a common life. After several weeks of necessary isolation I got again news from John, saying that he was willing to cooperate in new projects. During 2012 I invited him to take part in the study of the scorpions from the Mountains of Chad, what he accepted with great enthusiasm. This study was published yet in 2012 (Lourenço et al., 2012) and most certainly was his last scientific contribution to arachnology.

He will remain in our memories forever.

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