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In Memoriam: Van Rick McDaniel, 1945-2009

While Dr. Rick McDaniel served as mentor for many Master's students at Arkansas State University, he also was very active in the Arkansas Academy of Science and Southwestern Association of Naturalists (SWAN). His students were expected to present results of research at meetings of both organizations each year, and there was never a question of whether we would be attending those meetings. As a result, his students became familiar and comfortable with an aspect of professional life that gave us an advantage against other graduates seeking employment or entrance to doctoral programs.

McDaniel was born 29 October 1945 in San Antonio, Texas. After earning both his B.S. and M.S. degrees at Texas A & I, he completed his formal education at Texas Tech University, receiving the Ph.D. in 1973. His doctoral work focused on bats in Central America, and his interest in chiropteran biology fostered studies with several of his graduate students at ASU. Sometimes he was called the "batman of Arkansas."

Immediately upon completion of his doctoral degree in 1973, Dr. McDaniel became an Assistant Professor of Zoology at ASU, ascended to Associate Professor in 1977 and subsequently full Professor and departmental chair in 1984. During 1997, he entered the ranks of administrators with lengthy titles – beginning with Interim Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, followed by Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (1998), Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs (2000), Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs (also 2000), and

finally Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (2003).

Dr. McDaniel's list of academic accomplishments is fairly extensive. Between 1969 and 1999, he was an author on 81 publications and articles in a variety of journals and project reports, including 35 papers published in the Proceedings of the Arkansas Academy of Science. During the same period, he was co-author on 108 presentations of research, including 69 made at meetings of the AAS. From 1980 – 1981, he served as newsletter editor for AAS, and served as editor of the Proceedings from 1982–1986.

Work on thesis committees resulted in many of Dr. McDaniel's presentations and publications. He served on 61 thesis committees (30 of which he chaired), and although his research emphasis dealt with biology of mammals, he also was involved in studies of limnology, plants, protozoans, insects and other invertebrates, and all vertebrate groups. Being a grantee on 31 funded grants for research projects provided financial aid for several students.

Dr. McDaniel spent many hours at his office and with his graduate students. Soon after I became a graduate student at ASU, spark plugs fouled in my truck and he invited me to his house to change them. It was a trap. After getting the engine in running order, I was obligated to play a few games of ping-pong in his garage. He also played racquetball with students, and in the Mammalogy lab there was a nerf basketball goal which was used during study breaks to play contrived word games in which a missed basket provided a letter hint to the genus name of some mystery animal. He loved a tandem style of fishing Ozark creeks with 1-4 students, or fishing from boats in local lakes.

Several students went along on weekend caving trips, just for the sake of exploring a new and strange system. Sometimes a single trip to the unique and biologically unexplored environment would lead to an important and publishable discovery.

Having retired after a career spanning 35.5 years, Dr. McDaniel was playing golf when he suddenly and unexpectedly died 31 July 2009, at the age of 63. He is survived by his wife, three sons, five daughters, and 10 grandchildren. His academic legacy will be remembered due to his impact on Arkansas State University, the Academy, and the careers of his students.

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