

Johan Graham Anderson (1926-1970)

by

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Johan Graham Anderson, Senior Professional Officer in the Botanical Research Institute and, for many years, in charge of the Grass Section, died after a short illness brought on by a coronary thrombosis on 10th March, 1970, at the age of 43 years. Born at Douglas, Cape Province, on 17th October, 1926, he was the son of Hugh Graham Anderson, an Irish medical doctor who settled in South Africa, and Hailie Johanna Anderson (née Steenkamp). When eight years old he contracted poliomyelitis and meningitis simultaneously. Miraculously, he survived but was totally paralysed for a year. After months of constant nursing by his mother, who specially for this purpose took a course in massage, he started regaining the use of his arms, but his legs remained very weak.

In Cape Town he had several operations on his legs and was fitted with calipers, but it was only after his school years that he eventually learnt to walk with crutches. After private tuition as well as several years of regular schooling he passed the matriculation examination. He was then seventeen years of age and his progress must be seen as a remarkable achievement, in view of all the setbacks he had received. During all these years he had the constant help and support of his loving mother and younger brother, Wallace, who stood by him to the end of his life.

Although regarded as being physically unfit for a normal occupation, he was very active mentally and, in 1944, registered at the Potchefstroom University, entering for a B.Sc. course in Botany and Zoology. He left before fully completing the course and, on the 12th of February, 1949, was appointed as Technical Assistant in the then Division of Botany and Plant Pathology. Shortly after this appointment, he registered at the University of South Africa and received his B.Sc. degree in 1951, during which year he was also promoted to Assistant Professional Officer.

On the 14th of January 1956 he married Maria Bezuidenhout and from this marriage four children, two sons and two daughters, were born.

In 1963 he was promoted to Senior Professional Officer. In this rank he served the Botanical Research Institute until his untimely death. From the start of his career at the Institute he was associated with the Grass Section, from the end of 1950 as the officer in charge. The majority of his papers deal with this family, and are listed at the end of this appreciation. During the several years in which he was personally responsible for the general identification of grasses he amassed a deep knowledge of this group, which was to stand him in good stead in his research in later years.

The quality of his work was high and in addition to the listed publications he left a number of important manuscripts (such as the grasses for the revision of the Genera of South African Flowering Plants, the grasses for the Flora of Pretoria and a check-list of the South African grasses) in various stages of completion. His contributions to botany in South Africa should not be seen in

the light of his research output alone. During his career he personally identified more than 25,000 specimens and in addition supplied a wide range of information to numerous fellow botanists as well as scientists in other fields. Few if any of the authors of major works dealing with S.A. grasses — published in recent years — were not to some extent, indebted to Johan Anderson and his assistants at the Botanical Research Institute. Numerous technicians of the Department of Agricultural Technical Services received their basic courses in grass taxonomy as well as training in the identification of grasses from him.

In other spheres he also made significant contributions. He was one of the staff members who worked on the as yet unpublished list of botanical terms compiled jointly by the late Professor A. P. Goossens and the staff of the Botanical Research Institute. He was extremely competent in both official languages and gave invaluable service as a translator of botanical articles. In administrative matters he was meticulous and assisted his seniors by keeping records of various activities of the Institute. For many years he acted as secretary to the regular staff meetings.

It is clear that the constant and usually successful battle against his disabilities and the pain he had to endure deeply influenced his attitude to life. Very few problems seemed to him unsurmountable and he had a cheerful optimism which stimulated all those in contact with him. Perhaps his most outstanding characteristic was his extremely warm and human nature. He drew people to him in a remarkable way, and he was genuinely loved by his colleagues. He had as many friends in the lower ranks as he had among the seniors, thus acting as a link between the young and older staff members. Because of his warmth and inherent fairness he contributed greatly to the friendly atmosphere and the efficiency of the Institute. With his passing many have lost a good friend and colleague.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS — J. G. ANDERSON

1959. *Cenchrus brownii*, Burr-grass — Knopklitsgras. *Department of Agriculture Pamphlet*.
1960. Notes and New Records of African Flowering Plants (*Andropogon ravus*; *Danthonia stereophylla*; *Panicum volutans*) — *Bothalia* 7: 417-422.
1961. New and Interesting Taxa from Southern Africa (*Andropogon platybasis*; *Tricholaena monachne* var. *annua*; *Brachiaria dura* var. *pilosa*) — *Kirkia* 1: 102-104.
1962. Notes and New Records of African Plants (*Andropogon lacunosus*) — *Bothalia* 8: 113-114.
1963. Man and Beast Live on Grass. — Fmg in S. Afr. 39.
1964. Notes and New Records of African Plants (*Eriochrysis brachypogon* subsp. *australis*; *Danthonia aureocephala*) — *Bothalia* 8: 170-172.
1966. Typhaceae. *Fl. S. Afr.* 1: 53-56.
1966. The genus *Andropogon* in Southern Africa. *Bothalia* 9: 5-30.
1966. A new combination in *Hyparrhenia*. *Bothalia* 9: 130.
1966. *Common Weeds in South Africa/Algemene Onkruiden in Suid-Afrika*. Mem. Bot. Surv. S. Afr. No. 37, 440 pp. (With M. Henderson).
1967. A new species of *Panicum*. *Bothalia* 9: 341.
1967. A new variety of *Festuca costata*. *Bothalia* 9: 341.
1967. *Trachypogon spicatus*. *Flow. Pl. Afr.* 38, t.1512.