

HERMANUS PHILLIPUS VAN DER SCHIJFF (1921–1997)

Prof. Manie (Figure 3), as he was known to his friends and many of his colleagues, will be remembered as the first biologist appointed in the Kruger National Park and for laying the foundation for the scientific management of the Park. He will also be remembered for his enthusiasm, dedication and discipline that inspired so many students to further their studies in ecology, plant morphology and plant taxonomy. Prof. Manie was always there to lend a hand and to assist. I shall remember him as a person who was only satisfied with the best and he never accepted 'no' for an answer. Due to his intense interest in his students he always inspired them to deliver their best by working hard and by using their time profitably. He believed in set hours and expected to find postgraduate students diligently at work in the laboratories or in their offices after hours, without, however, sacrificing their social life. The example he set on field excursions was always stimulating and a wonderful learning experience.

Hermanus Phillipus van der Schijff was born on 18 August 1921 on the Farm Sterkstroom in the Ventersdorp District in the North-West (Western Transvaal). He attended the Sterkstroom West Primary School and after matriculating from the Ventersdorp Secondary School in 1941, he furthered his studies at the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education and was awarded a B.Sc. degree in 1944 majoring in Botany and

Chemistry. In 1945 the Potchefstroom Teachers College awarded him the Transvaal Teachers' Diploma and from 1946 to 1950 he intermittently furthered his teaching career while continuing with postgraduate studies.

In 1949 the Potchefstroom University for CHE conferred a M.Sc. degree in Botany on him and from June 1951 to March 1955 he was employed as plant ecologist in the Kruger National Park, during which time he undertook an ecological survey of the vegetation of the Park. He also established the well-known herbarium at Skukuza. During this time he collected more than 4 300 herbarium specimens, many of which were recorded for the first time in South Africa, as well as several new species. During the period of his employment in the Park he also established experimental burning plots in the major habitat types that are still monitored today and furthermore, laid the foundation for the burning policy of the Park.

In 1958 he received a D.Sc. degree (cum laude) in Botany from the Potchefstroom University for CHE presenting a thesis entitled: *'n Ekologiese studie van die flora van die Nasionale Krugerwildtuin* (An ecological study of the flora of the Kruger National Park). This work served until recently as the foundation for many ecological studies in the Kruger National Park.



FIGURE 3.—Hermanus Phillipus van der Schijff (1921–1977).

Upon leaving the Parks Board he accepted a post as professional officer in pasture science in the Agricultural Faculty of the University of Pretoria, in March 1955. Subsequently, in 1956 he became a lecturer, and later senior lecturer in Botany at the same University where in 1964 he was appointed Head of the Department of General Botany and occupied the Louis Botha Chair.

Through his enthusiasm and dedication, plant ecology was established as a major discipline in the department and this later developed into one of the recognised ecology groups in South Africa. The success of his teaching career is reflected in the many students who have obtained their postgraduate qualifications under his supervision and guidance and who still today occupy important positions in botany.

In 1972 Prof. van der Schijff became Dean of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and in 1973 a member of the University Board. From 1982 until his retirement on 31 December 1986 he was Vice-Principal of Natural Sciences at the University of Pretoria. Prof. van der Schijff made many significant and lasting contributions in his capacity as Dean, Vice-Principal, member of the University Council and the Executive Committee of the Senate, as well as member and vice-chairman/chairman of many other committees, bureaux and councils at the University of Pretoria.

Throughout his university career Prof. van der Schijff remained active in collecting herbarium material, in total more than 8 000 numbers, mostly at Mariepskop (Figure 4), in the Northern Province (northern Transvaal) and in Namaqualand.

During 1965, with the support of the CSIR, he did post-doctoral research as a 'Mercer Research Fellow' at the Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University. En route there and back he visited various botanical institutes in England, France, The Netherlands, Germany, Austria and Switzerland. He also visited Puerto Rico in the Caribbean Sea. During 1969 he again visited several universities abroad, and in the United States of America he investigated the teaching methods of biology followed at American schools and the transition between school and university. During this visit he also attended the International Botanical Congress in Seattle where he delivered a paper. On invitation he also attended the centenary celebrations of the Arnold Arboretum. On his return to South Africa he again visited several universities in France, Germany, Switzerland and Austria. In 1974 he attended the VIIIth AETFAT Congress in Geneva, Switzerland.



FIGURE 4.—Prof. Manie sitting on *Encephalartos* sp. during one of his field trips.

During 1980 Prof. van der Schijff, with financial support from the CSIR, visited universities and botanical institutes in the United States of America and Europe including a visit to the house of Linnaeus in Uppsala, Sweden. After this he attended a symposium in Nice, France during 1981 as a guest of Sperri-Univac, at the same time also visiting several computer companies in Paris. In 1985 he again attended the AETFAT Congress, this time in St Louis in the USA.

Included in his extracurricular activities were, inter alia, full membership of the 'Suid Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns' (South African Academy of Sciences and Art), Vice-chairman of the Academy Council and Chairman of the Council of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Technology. Furthermore he was also a member of the editorial board of the *Tydskrif vir Natuurwetenskappe* (Journal of Natural Sciences).

Prof. van der Schijff was also a member of several professional scientific societies. He was President of the Joint Council for Natural Scientific Societies (1970–1971), The South African Association of Botanists (1971–1972), and The South African Biological Society (1971). He was Vice-chairman of the Transvaal Museum Board, Member of the Executive Committee of The Transvaal Board for Nature Conservation, Honorary President of The South African Aloe and Succulent Society, Member of the Botanical Advisory Committee of the Department of Agricultural and Technical Services, and finally, a board member of the Associated Scientific Societies of South Africa. Other noteworthy appointments include membership of the senate of the University of Transkei, Rand Afrikaans University, University of Venda and the University of Durban Westville; and of the Faculty Board for Natural Sciences of the University of South Africa.

It must be recorded that Prof. van der Schijff played a major role in the establishment of the Joint Council for Natural Sciences and the South African Association of Botanists.

The youth of South Africa were always very important to Prof. van der Schijff and it is little wonder that he was deeply involved in the field of education. As a member of the Joint Matriculation Board he was Chairman of the Committee for Biological Sciences and a member of the Biology Curriculum Committee while also serving on the Examination Board of the Department of Education and Development. In addition he was a member of the Board of Moderators of the Transvaal Department of Education, moderator for Biology and Botany of the Joint Matriculation Board and for Biology for the Transvaal Department of Education. During the period 1979/1980 he served as Chairman of the Joint Matriculation Board and was nominated to serve on the Supervisory Committees for experiments with the curricula and curriculum development in the Transvaal and Cape Province.

Prof. van der Schijff was jointly responsible for the establishment of the postgraduate course in Wildlife Management at the University of Pretoria. Twenty-seven masters and sixteen doctoral students graduated under his supervision.

As academic and researcher, Prof. van der Schijff was author and co-author of over eighty research papers, textbooks in general botany and manuals for practical courses in botany at university level. He was also co-author and planner of several textbooks in biology for secondary schools.

Prof. van der Schijff is not only known in the academic world but through his contributions in the Afrikaans newspaper 'Die Beeld' and many appearances on radio and television programmes on environment and environmental management issues—he became a familiar name in many households. He also delivered many popular talks on nature and environmental conservation issues.

Until his death he was intimately involved with the environmental management of Krygkor terrains and the Lesotho Highland Water Project.

He received many awards for his immense contribution to science and biology at school and university level, more specifically the environmental sciences. The awards included the Senior Captain Scott Medal from the South African Biological Society, the Havenga Prize for Biology from the South African Academy for Sciences and Art, Honorary Doctorates from the Potchefstroom University for CHE and the University of Pretoria, Medal and Honorary Award from the South Africa Federation of Science and Mathematical Teachers, Medal from the Joint Matriculation Board, The Silver Medal of the Order of Meritorious Service from the State President and the Medal of Merit for Environmental Management from the Krygkor Group. The gardens surrounding the buildings of the Botany Department at the University of Pretoria are named after Prof. van der Schijff (Figure 5).



FIGURE 5.—Prof. Manie admiring a *Strelitzia* in the University garden which is named after him.

In his youth Prof. van der Schijff was active in sport and he was captain of the first rugby team of the Ventersdorp Secondary School and of the first rugby team and rugby club of the Potchefstroom Teachers' College. He also played for Western Transvaal. Furthermore, he was the under-19 rugby coach for the University of Pretoria and a selector for Northern Transvaal.

At the University, Prof. van der Schijff was well loved by his students. Although he was very strict, he was reasonable in his expectations and always had something humorous to share with his students. His involvement with student rugby and student activities, such as being President of the Student Biological Society, the Student Science Society and the Cross Country Society, was appreciated by the students. In 1986 the Students Council of the University of Pretoria honoured Prof. van der Schijff with the Dux Docens Award.

Prof. Manie was married to Miss Joy van Niekerk of Senekal in the Free State and they have three sons and three daughters all of whom have good university qualifications. The Van der Schijffs were always a closely knit family, and as one of his sons put it, there was never a dull moment in their home when Prof. Manie was around. As a student of Prof. van der Schijff, I personally can only agree with him.

The above account bears ample evidence of the great role this beloved professor played in the development of botany and science in South Africa.

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Mrs Joy van der Schijff and Mr Herman van der Schijff, one of his sons, supplied much of the information for this tribute to Prof. van der Schijff.

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