

OBITUARIES

DAVID SPENCER HARDY (1931–1998)

Ah! like gold fall the leaves in the wind, long years numberless as the wings of trees! The long years have passed like swift draughts of the sweet mead in lofty halls of the West ... Farewell!

J.R.R. Tolkien: *The Lord of the Rings*

An era has ended for those of us who have an interest in succulents or, indeed, in all living plants of southern Africa of any kind. To us who knew him so well, Dave Hardy (Figure 1) seemed ageless and, sometimes in more ways than one, timeless; yet mortality has now also claimed him. He passed away in Pretoria on the night of 31 May 1998 of complications after surgery.

David Spencer Hardy was born in Pretoria on 24 September 1931. His education included only four subjects at Matriculation level (i.e. not a full matriculation certificate), which makes his subsequent achievements all the more remarkable, and also shows that academic qualifications are not always a reliable indicator of underlying intelligence. He joined the Department of Agriculture on 21 February 1951 (Gunn & Codd 1981), when he was appointed Technician at the Veterinary Research Institute, Onderstepoort. In 1958 he was transferred to the Division of Botany, which subsequently became the Botanical Research Institute and in 1989 the National Botanical Institute. Here he was responsible for cultivating living plant material brought in from the field by scientists, and in due course, by himself and his extraordinary circle of friends, acquaintances and contacts. He displayed a particular aptitude for growing succulents and greenhouse plants. Not only did he grow them, but he studied them in minute and painstaking detail, observing their similarities and differences both in appearance and cultural requirements (Figure 2). His dedication paid dividends: plants that others declared impossible to cultivate away from their natural habitat, grew, flourished and became commonplace for him.

Dave maintained two particularly 'special' areas in the nursery at the Pretoria National Botanical Garden, two purportedly identical greenhouses situated next to each other. In one he assembled what was at its best the finest collection of rare and endangered Madagascan plants in the world. In the other he started, a few years before he retired, to re-create his vision of the Namib Desert: a Namib not to be found in the real world, where one would have to travel many hundreds of kilometres to see the plants that Dave managed to persuade to grow right next to one another (Figure 3). It is fitting that what he referred to as the Madagascar house now bears a brass plaque reading:

The Hardy Collection of rare and endangered plants. Named for David Spencer Hardy, plant collector and succulent grower extraordinary.

During his career he collected extensively in the northwestern Cape (Northern Cape Province: Namaqua-

land, Upington, Prieska, Richtersveld etc.). He also undertook many expeditions to Namibia and Northern Province, South Africa, often at his own expense, as well as to Madagascar, Angola, Comoro Islands and Mauritius. He established a small garden of Madagascan plants at Nwanedi National Park in the former Venda homeland, where he could cultivate some of the more cold-sensitive species out of doors. Dave enjoyed the outdoors, and his collecting trips were, in addition to their scientific content, a welcome escape from what he saw as office drudgery. And so he blossomed; as he relaxed with increasing distance from Pretoria, so the stories of past adventures came out, and new ones happened. For example, on an expedition of which I was privileged to be a part, he broke the ice with a tale of how he and Brand van Breda, then of Worcester Veld Reserve, went to the Richtersveld in a Volkswagen Beetle long before anyone thought of made roads in that area. They stopped to ask directions of a passing goatherd one day, and then asked if the old lady thought they would reach their destination in that vehicle. The old goatherd squatted down, peered under the car and replied 'Nee menere, in hierdie motor sal djulle ry soos 'n bokooi wat swaar in die melk is', roughly translated as 'No, gentlemen, in this car you will go like a nanny-goat heavily in milk'.



FIGURE 1.—David Spencer Hardy (1931–1998). Studio portrait made by A. Romanowski in 1984.



FIGURE 2.—Dave Hardy with one of his favourite subjects of study, an aloe. Photo: Fanie Venter.

Field work was however not all humour. There were plants to be studied, considered and collected, and when one returned home there were papers to be prepared and reports to be compiled. Often, the collections included fragile flowering material for illustration and eventual inclusion in *The Flowering Plants of Africa*. Many plates published between about 1958 and Dave's retirement in 1991 record that the original material was a Hardy collection; a smaller number were written up by Dave himself, often with one of the Institute scientists as co-author. Volume 48 of *The Flowering Plants of Africa* is dedicated to Dave with the words 'His acute perception of the individual cultural needs of plants and especially members of the extremely rich succulent flora of southern Africa and Madagascar is the underlying secret of his success. He has given special attention to subjects suitable for inclusion in these pages and has, on occasions, also

supplied the text'. Dave's written output was prodigious, especially when one considers that most of it was written in his 'spare' time, apart from his horticultural duties. Unfortunately, he was averse to recording his own activities, with the result that the attached list of 174 publications cannot be said with certainty to be complete. These publications are supported not only by the living material in the Pretoria National Botanical Garden and elsewhere (a true gardener, Dave was always generous with cuttings, seeds and other propagules), but by over 7 000 herbarium specimens; the first set is housed in PRE, but there are many duplicates in herbaria around the world.

His publications include two books on succulents (Bornman & Hardy 1972; Hardy & Fabian 1992). Most of the remainder are semi-popular, which reflects his passion for popularising and publicising his beloved suc-



FIGURE 3.—Dave Hardy in the glass-house for desert plants at the National Botanical Garden, Pretoria. In the foreground is a member of the grape family, *Cyphostemma curorii* from Namibia.

culents. This did not stop at the written word. Dave was a popular and sought-after speaker at meetings of societies concerned with plants, and 18 of his talks were included in the Department of Agriculture's contribution to the radio spectrum, *Calling all Farmers*. On several occasions he presented survival courses to the South African Defence Force.

After his retirement Dave concentrated on Madagascar, a country he loved. In May-June 1993 he did restoration work at Jardin Botanique et Zoologique de Tananarive, and the next year he returned to survey aquatic weeds in the Antananarivo area (Dorr 1997). He also led several tour groups through the botanical glories of the island, and was involved in a project to restore populations of *Aloe suzannae*, Madagascar's most spectacular aloe.

He was a member of the South African Association of Botanists, and was awarded their Certificate of Merit in January 1991; this is the Association's award in recogni-

tion of services to botany by those without a degree in the subject. In the same year he was awarded the Fellowship of the Cactus and Succulent Society of America in recognition of his field exploration, descriptions of new taxa (at least seven) and for his more popular publications (Mitich 1991). He also belonged to the Succulent Society of South Africa (serving on the editorial board of *Aloe*), the British Cactus and Succulent Society, the California Rare Fruit Growers' Association, the Mauritian Cactus and Succulent Society, the Cycad Society of South Africa and the Natal Succulent Society.

The first living creature to be named after Dave was a blood-sucking fly, *Raymondia hardyi*, found on a bat which he collected while still in his teens. He is commemorated in the names of several plants: *Stultitia hardyi* Dyer, *Stapelianthus hardyi* Lavranos, *Euphorbia platyclada* var. *hardyi* Rauh, *Aloe hardyi* Glen, *Cyphostemma hardyi* Retief and *Strumaria hardyana* D. & U. Müller-Doblies.

EXTRACT FROM DAVE'S DIARY

One can escape one's enemies or evade the attention of friends,
but no-one can escape or evade themselves.
Man is the architect of his own fortune
Not all things came easily in my life but I took them,
planned them, because I wanted them.
My insatiable desire to explore the unknown;
adventure is my lifeblood—after all why fret about tomorrow
if today be sweet,
tomorrow I may be with yesterday's 7000 years
My family, my friends, my deserts, my forests mean more
to me than millions of dollars.
Man sometimes forgives—but never forgets
nature never forgives and never forgets
God always forgives!
Thank you all for being my friends and being here today
Life has indeed been good to me
'I did it my way'

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