

A life dedicated to lichens and literature, Ove Almborn, 30th July 1914 to 6th March 1992

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Ove Almborn was born on 30 July 1914 in Ronneby in southeastern Sweden, just before the first World War. Unlike numerous other children who were born in the same dark period of European history, Ove was fortunate enough to grow up in a country which was spared the horrors of war. He could live through a happy childhood in the small idyllic town of Ronneby in a nice home cared for by loving parents. This period in his life must have formed the confident and kind personality we knew much later. In his early school days Ove was already interested in botany and his interest in lichens also started very early. He matriculated in the nearby town of Karlskrona in 1933 and in the same year he started his academic studies at the University of Lund. He studied chemistry, zoology and botany as part of a Bachelor of Arts degree and qualified as a high school teacher. With the academic studies his interest in botany deepened and after several excursions in the province of Skåne, this deepened further. Among other things he found lichens that are better known for their southern continental distribution in northern Europe.

In 1938 he started working on a thesis, after discussions with colleagues at Uppsala in particular, which resulted in his doctoral dissertation in 1948. This must have been a very stimulating period in his life with numerous excursions to the Scandinavian beech forests, meetings with colleagues, filing and determining specimens, and related activities. Several other papers related to his thesis also appeared during this period. His well known thesis 'Distribution and ecology of some south Scandinavian lichens' was presented in the classical style introduced by Prof. G.E. du Rietz and his pupils Gunnar Degelius, Sten Ahlner as well as the later Torsten Hasselrot. Twenty-seven corticolous lichen species were very thoroughly investigated and mapped and the principle factors influencing their distribution were discussed. Ove was very pleased to see that his well-documented material came to form the basis for a larger research project 50 years later at the Department of Systematic Botany, on endangered lichens in southern Sweden.

Defending a thesis in those days was something like running through a wall. In the first place, you were of course supposed to pass, but also had to land elegantly like a cat with all feet on the ground, i.e. get high marks on the thesis in order to continue on the narrow path to an uncertain academic chair. The candidate got marks for both the content of the thesis and the defence. Ove told me the story of his defence several times in a very ironic

manner, recalling the academic environment of those days. It took place on a splendid summer's day, May 20. The lecture hall was beautifully decorated, as is the usual custom, with flowers of all kinds. However, since his early youth Ove suffered from pollen allergy and therefore had taken several drugs against an impending allergic reaction, which resulted in him almost falling asleep and not responding promptly to questions put forward by the opponents. However, Ove passed the exams very well, and the retiring professor did not have to fail one of his last pupils. His marks even stated that he handled the defence in an excellent manner, in spite of the fact that he at times was barely awake. Ove Almborn, through the successful defence of his thesis, was then granted a limited period of continuing research as a 'docent' (associate professor). One question remained, and that was what to do next?

South African lichens

The new professor, Henning Weimarck, who had previously worked on the flora of southern Africa, knew well the many stimulating problems one could encounter in the numerous plant groups present in this floristically very interesting part of the world. The tradition to work on the flora of southern Africa already started at the end of the eighteenth century, when Carl Peter Thunberg and Anders Sparman collected and travelled there for extended periods. Thore C.E. Fries, who was professor at Lund for a short period at the end of the twenties, together with Henning Weimarck and Tycho Norlind continued the Swedish tradition of floristic work in this interesting region. Therefore Weimarck recommended that Ove Almborn should go to southern Africa and start collecting material for a lichen flora of the region. The plans took form after he had received a research grant from the Swedish Natural Science Research Council. He started on his journey by ship which arrived at Cape Town in July 1953. The South African journey was very successful and Ove Almborn travelled widely and made extensive collections during the approximately six months he spent in Africa. During his sojourn he also made many new acquaintances and, to my knowledge, he maintained especially close contact with Ted Schelpe through the years. He also knew many of the older generation of South African botanists, such as Louisa Bolus, Leslie Codd, Bernard de Winter, Allen Dyer and many others.

When Ove returned home, his research period as a 'docent' was nearly over and he had to seek a position outside the university as a teacher. He got a good opportunity at a high school in the nearby city of Malmö. Ove would again return to South Africa in 1981 for the AETFAT Congress, and in 1983 and 1984.

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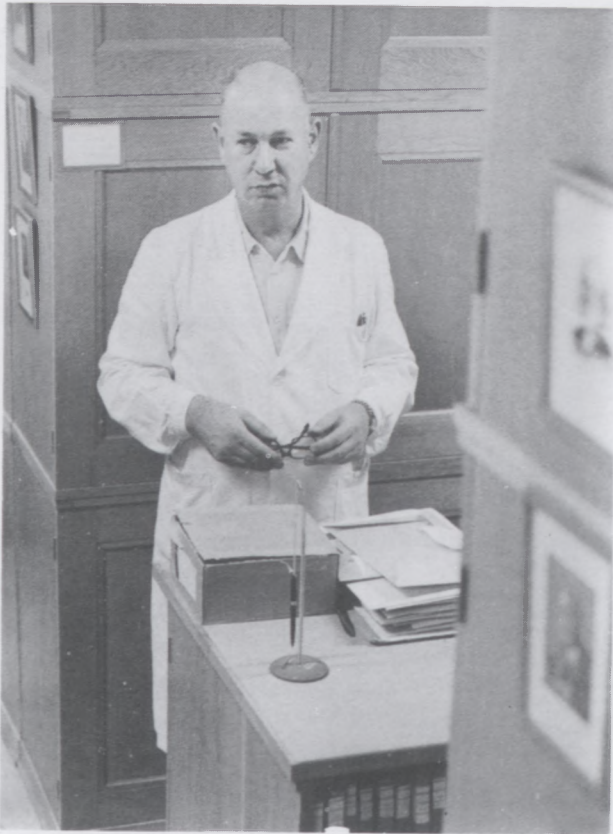


FIGURE 1.—Ove Almborn in the lichen herbarium in the Botanical Museum at Lund. Photo by M.E. Hale 1972.

School teacher

From 1954 to 1966, Ove Almborn could not spend as much time on his collections as he had wished. However, in spite of preparing lectures, correcting exams, etc., the time a high school teacher actually had to spend in classrooms was not very long and there were always a few afternoons, evenings, weekends, and long holidays free to work on collections. Some papers also appeared in this period, among them Almborn's second largest work, on the lichen flora of the island of Hallands Väderö in 1955. His first paper on the lichen family Teloschistaceae also appeared in 1963, along with the first three fascicles of his exsiccate, *Lichenes Africani*. In the same period Ove Almborn also re-organized and built up a fine general lichen herbarium. He obviously had already made up his mind that he would not retire as an old school master, and he was looking for an opportunity to get back into research at Lund. An opening came in 1966, when the position of keeper of the herbarium became vacant.

Keeper of the herbarium

The former keeper of the herbarium Dr Tycho Norlindh had accepted a professorship at the Natural History Museum in Stockholm, but the position at Lund had not yet been filled. There were three competitors for the position: one less qualified; Ove Almborn who was well qualified; and Rolf Dahlgren who was more than qualified. When Dahlgren withdrew his application, the road became clear for Ove Almborn and he was appointed as keeper of the herbarium in 1966.

There were many duties to take care of at the Botanical Museum and through the years until his retirement in 1980, Almborn managed to organize a well-kept herbarium, which also gained an international reputation for its high standards. These were times, long before PC computers entered our offices. Nevertheless, Almborn kept excellent files of all loan inquiries, loan material sent out or borrowed and other documentation.

Although attached to the Department of Systematic Botany, Almborn was not really engaged in any academic teaching during these years, as his main responsibilities concerned the museum. However, since numerous students visited the museum in connection with various courses through the years, Ove Almborn came into contact with two students who had become interested in the systematics of lichens. He was also allowed to act partly as supervisor of these students. One of these was Hans Runemark, the former head of the Department of Systematic Botany, and the other was myself.

Taxonomic literature

From fairly early on in his student days, Ove Almborn had been very interested in botanical literature, especially the older works. He had his own library and was also very proud of a nearly complete collection of Linnaeana. In his time as keeper of the herbarium, this interest also took on a more collaborative character. For example, he became much involved in helping Dr Frans Stafleu, at the International Bureau for Plant Taxonomy and Nomenclature at Utrecht, with various bibliographic problems. Thus Almborn was of considerable help to Stafleu in producing his monumental works with Richard S. Cowan on taxonomic literature.



FIGURE 2.—Ove Almborn collecting corticolous lichens in the fifties.



FIGURE 3.—Ove Almborn beside Ted Schelpe in the Bolus Herbarium. Photo by E.I. Kärnefelt 1984.

The collaboration with Stafleau also resulted in numerous review articles published in *Taxon* through the years, especially on lichenological literature published in the series *Bibliotheca Lichenologica*. There are numerous other review articles, not only on lichenological literature, but also on other major botanical works. These reviews were published mainly in *Botaniska Notiser* and *Nordic Journal of Botany*. Almborn's large lichenological library also grew extensively in this period and we now enjoy one of the best libraries on lichenological literature at our laboratories. He kindly put this library at the disposal of younger generations of lichenologists working at the Department of Systematic Botany.

The international profile

Rather early on in his career Ove Almborn established contact with a very large community of colleagues, foremost through an extensive correspondence, and through the years he became well known internationally. This side of him also deepened in the years as keeper of the herbarium. Thousands of letters from lichenologists and other botanists now exist, dating from 1950 to shortly before his death, which are bound to be of great historical value in years to come. The correspondence was particularly fruitful with persons such as Mason Hale, Josef Poelt and Rolf Santesson. Through Ove Almborn I was personally introduced to many of these colleagues during their visits to Lund. Ove Almborn was also a frequent participant at botanical congresses. At these gatherings Ove really en-

joyed life, and at congress dinners or similar occasions, he used to raise the festive atmosphere by telling good stories from his rich repertoire on botanists of the golden days.

The last years

We remember Ove as an extremely kind, helpful and generous friend and colleague who was always willing to lend a helping hand, especially when it came to sharing some of his enormous knowledge of literature. With a certain melancholy he saw his circle of older friends getting smaller and smaller with the years. Periodically he suffered from physical pain in his back and legs and he was frustrated that his two largest projects could not be completed, namely a lichen flora of southern Africa and a monograph of the genus *Pertusaria*. I tried to console him by pointing out that he was by no means unique in not fulfilling all his aspirations. He prepared everything well for his successors. He bequeathed all his possessions to the University of Lund, a large portion of the most valuable classical books, which he kept at home, to the main University library, the rest to the Department of Systematic Botany.

Through the years Ove and I grew closer and he entrusted to me matters of personal concern which one would only confide to a close relative. We had a wonderful time indeed on our joint trip in southern Africa in 1984 in spite of the age difference of 30 years. Ove Almborn



FIGURE 4.—Ove Almborn collecting lichens in the Great Karroo. Photo by E.I. Kärnefelt 1984.

had no close relatives and it was therefore particularly pleasing to him to see the younger generations of students burgeoning around him in the science of lichenology, which had become his life's work, and which he himself had introduced to Lund.

In my office I have a picture of Ove and myself taken, by Aino Henssen, one nice summer's day in 1986 in the

botanical garden of Lund. It is a dear memory to me. It will fade through the years, as I will myself. Now his spirit is elsewhere, as I imagined once, in Namaqualand among *Feliciae* and *Ursinae* in the flowering season. He died alone in his home on March 6 1992. His ashes rest in a beautiful cemetery on top of a small hill close to Ronneby, in his parents' grave shaded by trees all covered in lichens.

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