



## The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club

### 2016 Honorary Member: John McNeill

*This award is presented in recognition of outstanding contributions by a member or non-member to Canadian natural history or to the successful operation of the Club over many years.*

It is a pleasure to award Honorary Membership in the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club to Canadian-Scottish botanist John McNeill. Long recognized as an international authority on vascular plant taxonomy and nomenclature, Dr. McNeill has also served important roles in academic and research institutions in both Ottawa and Toronto.

John McNeill was born in Scotland and earned his doctorate at the University of Edinburgh. After serving as a Lecturer at the University of Reading and University of Liverpool from 1957-1969, he came to Ottawa having accepted a position at the Plant Research Institute of Agriculture Canada (now called Agriculture and Agri-food Canada [AAFC]), and so began his long and productive period as a Canadian research botanist. Dr. McNeill contributed a great deal to the development of the plant systematics unit of AAFC and authored many papers on Canadian plants. One of his best known is "Grasses of Ontario" with William Dore. That monumental work may never have been completed without McNeill's collaboration. Other important titles concerning Canada were "The conservation of evolutionary centres in Canada", "The genus *Atriplex* in Canada", and several papers on the genus *Polygonum*. He also is an expert on the evolution of weeds and he contributed to the first complete inventory of Canadian weeds. During his years at the Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa, his door was always open to the professional and non-professional alike. He has always been both patient with enquiries and generous in his contributions to the work of others.

John McNeill is not only an accomplished researcher but also an extraordinary teacher, always ready to share his expert and vast botanical knowledge with anyone in need. In 1978 he took a short work transfer to the University of Toronto to assist in teaching plant systematics when the program was without staffing. In 1981, he left AAFC to become Professor and Chair of the Department of Botany at the University of Ottawa. One of his master's degree students at the U of O was Laurie Consaul, who became an accomplished botanist and was an avid birder well known to members of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club.

Dr. McNeill returned to Scotland in 1987 to serve as Regius Keeper (Director) of the Royal Botanical Garden in Edinburgh. Only a few years later, he returned to Canada to teach at the University of Toronto and serve as Assistant Director of the Royal Ontario Museum, later becoming Director, and, in 1995, President of that institution. He remains Emeritus Director of the ROM.

Aside from his profound influence on hundreds of Canadian students and many Canadian botanists through his academic work, John McNeill served Canadian botany and the

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international botanical community as an expert on matters of biostatistics and botanical nomenclature. Any botanist anywhere in the world who has dealt with the names of plants using the *International Code of Botanical Nomenclature*, the global 'rule book' for the official naming of plant taxa, has benefitted from John McNeill's contributions in that field. As a Canadian botanist of international renown, he is rightly a major source of national pride.

Most recently, Dr. McNeill has been a major contributor to the ongoing Flora of North America project, providing particularly critical input in two large and complex groups of plants, Caryophyllaceae (Pink Family) and Polygonaceae (Knotweed Family).

In 1999, he retired from the ROM and returned once again to Edinburgh where he has maintained a remarkably full program of pure and applied taxonomic research as Honorary Research Associate of the Royal Botanical Gardens, often doing editorial work with the journal, *Taxon*, dealing especially with nomenclatural issues, and, most significantly, he continues to play a large role in the revision and management of the *International Code of Botanical Nomenclature* and is the senior author of the current (Melbourne 2011) edition of the Code.

This combination of contributions both to science and to the research process itself on a regional, national and global scale is remarkable if not unique. That in addition John McNeill has inspired and assisted the careers and discoveries of others makes his contribution to Canadian natural sciences all the more impressive.

OFNC Honorary Membership is appropriate for this long-time member of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club (since 1970), acknowledging his impact on Canadian botany through his own publications and those of his Canadian students, as well as his international reputation as a leader on matters concerning botanical nomenclature.

*Prepared by Dan Brunton and Irwin Brodo, with assistance of Paul Catling and Jacques Cayouette*

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