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ARTURS NEBOISS

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Arturs was born in Rīga, Latvia on the 30th of November 1924, the only child of Jānis and Matilde Neboiss. His father worked in the Stock Exchange of Rīga. During the winter the family lived in Rīga and Arturs attended school. Summers were spent at the family's property in Ogre.

Arturs interest in nature was awakened by his teacher in nature studies in the first year in high school who suggested to the class, as they were breaking up for the summer holidays, that each student should spend some time during the summer collecting some natural objects to discuss in the next term. Whilst enjoying his holidays, Arturs noticed a number of interesting butterflies about. He started collecting them and, by the end of the holidays, had some 30 specimens stuck on cardboard. The teacher was so impressed that she arranged for Arturs to meet an entomologist who was able to teach him some of the basic principles of entomology.

At the start of the Second World War, Arturs, like many Latvians, found refuge in the West. After the war, he completed his undergraduate and masters studies at the Baltic University in Hamburg, Germany working on lizards. He worked at the university as a laboratory assistant and as a draftsman in the Institute of Geophysics.

In 1947, whilst in Hamburg, Arturs married Aina Vcprmane. They could not return to Latvia, which was occupied by the Russian Communists, and there was little future for the family in war ravaged Germany, so they decided to emigrate and arrived in Melbourne, Australia in 1950. Their daughter Ilze was born in 1955.

Arturs initially worked as a caretaker at St Catherine's Girls Grammar in Toorak before moving to the Bureau of Mineral Resources as a cartographic draftsman.

In 1952 he began his career in sciences when he was appointed to the position of Assistant Research Officer in the Department of Crown Lands and Survey investigating bloodsucking insects (mosquitos, flies and fleas) as vectors of myxomatosis. During this time he forged a working relationship with both the Director (Mr Pescott) and the Curator of Entomology (Mr Alec Burns) at the National Museum of Victoria. He was appointed the Assistant Curator of Entomology in January 1954, after the retirement of Mr Charles Oke.

In 1956, he was awarded his second masters degree by the University of Melbourne for his work on myxomatosis and click beetles (Elateridae). After Alec Burns retired in 1964, Arturs was appointed Curator of Entomology.

In 1965 and 1966 Arturs was a member of scientific expeditions to the South West corner of Tasmania, in an area around Lake Pedder. This part of Tasmania has been shielded by mountain ranges and is home to several unique insect species. Arturs collected more than 3000 specimens.

In 1969 Arturs and Aina divorced. Arturs married Austra Kants in 1970, adopting her 3 children.

In 1954, Arturs was accepted as a Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society, London. His research in entomology received worldwide recognition. He attended many International Symposia on Entomology, Plecoptera and Trichoptera in Moscow, Sweden, Canberra and Austria. He was awarded visiting scientist status at institutions such as the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, USA, the Max Planck Institute, Germany and the Zoological Institute, Leningrad.

His work on Trichoptera won him international recognition as an authority on the classification of aquatic insects. He was an invited speaker at numerous International Symposia on aquatic insects and was selected in 1974 as the Australia New Zealand representative to the International Committee of Trichopterists at Lunz, Austria. He was re-elected in 1977 at Reading, UK and again in 1980 at Perugia, Italy.

In 1976 he was awarded his PhD from Monash University, Melbourne for his thesis on the Taxonomy and Zoogeography of Tasmanian Caddis-flies (Trichoptera).

Arturs retired from the Museum in 1989 but continued his work on caddisflies.

By 1991, he had published 85 papers on Elateridae and Cupedidae (Coleoptera), Acroceridae and Syrphidae (Diptera), Plecoptera and Trichoptera (the majority) including 42 genera and 325 species of insects. Five insect genera and 42 species have been named after him. A major achievement was the 1986 publication of his "Atlas of Trichoptera of the SW Pacific – Australian Region", a key reference for Australasian species. Another was his encouragement of a small group of Australian entomologists to work on Trichoptera. Due to Arturs' work, the Museum Victoria Trichoptera collection is the largest and most comprehensive in the Southern Hemisphere, attracting specimen donations, loan requests and visiting scientists from all over the world.

His main hobbies were photography and stamp collecting. For many years he was an active member of the Latvian Photo Club in Melbourne. He made a short film on insects for presentation at a conference in Portugal that was awarded the first prize - a large silver cup.

As his health began to fail, he and Austra moved into the Latvian Village in Melbourne in 2009. He passed away on the 11th of June 2010 and is survived by his wife Austra, daughter Ilze, granddaughters Larissa and Natly and stepchildren Arnis, Brigita and Ivars and their families.

Catriona McPhee
Dr Ken Walker
Dr Alice Wells
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