

Lawrence B. Slobodkin, ל"ר

Lawrence B. Slobodkin passed away on 12 September, 2009. He was Emeritus Professor at the University of Stony Brook. There he founded Stony Brook's Ecology and Evolution Program in 1968, the first of its kind anywhere. In mid-1970, it grew into a full-fledged department, perennially among the very best. He served as department chair for five years and as director of its graduate program for seven years, and retired from the faculty in 1999. He was on the faculty in the Department of Zoology at the University of Michigan, between 1953 and 1969.

Born in the Bronx in 1928, son of a writer mother and sculptor father (later a famed illustrator and writer of children's books), Slobodkin grew up among artists and thinkers. This background helped to shape his broad interests and his intellectual perspective. He took an early interest in biology, which he later pursued under G.E. Hutchinson at Yale for his doctorate (1951) at a time when ecology was beginning to build a modern theoretical and mathematical framework on foundations laid by Volterra and Gause. Slobodkin played an important role in developing this framework, helping to define the fields of population ecology and theoretical ecology with his classic book, *Growth and Regulation of Animal Populations* (1961). His early studies of *Daphnia* populations raised questions about the adequacy of the logistic model of population growth and probed the key role of age structure in population fluctuations. His papers on trophic structure in the 1960s with Nelson Hairston, Sr. and Fred Smith raised questions about population regulation and ecosystem function that still stimulate debate and research. His influential research with green and brown hydra demonstrated the energetic continuum between mutualism and parasitism.

In more recent years, Slobodkin thought deeply and wrote eloquently about concepts of simplicity and complexity in science and philosophy and the relevance of ecological concepts to policy decisions and public understanding. By the time he moved from Ann Arbor to Stony Brook, he was an internationally renowned ecologist, who during his career was a Guggenheim Fellow (twice), a Fulbright Fellow (twice), and an elected Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. He was elected a Foreign Member of the Linnaean Society of London in 2002 and received the Eminent Ecologist Award of the Ecological Society of America in 2005.

Slobodkin was known for his creative, sometimes quirky, thinking, his broad and eclectic knowledge, and his quick, often ironic wit, all of which ran through both his conversation and his teaching. His wide-ranging intellect and non-linear references and analogies inspired independent thinking in some students and perplexed others. He influenced many students as an instructor in the summer course in marine ecology at the Marine Biology Laboratory in Woods Hole in the 1960s, and as Visiting Professor at the Hebrew University, Tel-Aviv University, Ben-Gurion University, and the Weizman Institute. His eight PhD students at the University of Michigan and twelve at Stony Brook include several well-known ecologists, environmental scientists, and evolutionary biologists.

Earlier this year, *Evolutionary Ecology Research* published a special issue (Vol. 11, No. 3, March 2009) dedicated to Slobodkin that included an autobiographical sketch and research

papers by his students and collaborators in the print issue, together with more personal remembrances online (www.evolutionary-ecology.com/v1.html#Tributes). Asked to write a piece for the Ecological Society of America's series, *What Do Ecologists Do?*, after receiving the ESA's Eminent Ecologist Award in 2005, Slobodkin wrote: 'My own advice on career development is that there are three career paths open and it is wise to excel at one of them: The first is to become an expert on some group of organisms that excites you Second, you [could] become very good at the most popular current techniques at the highest technical level you can imagine. In contrast, you can take the third, and most dangerous, path. You can strenuously avoid doing what everyone else is doing and search for new ideas and new tests for old ideas' (www.esa.org/education/ecologists_profile/EcologistsProfileDirectory/index.php?Closer=87). Larry Slobodkin followed, with intensity, that third and most perilous path.

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