

Richard L. Hoffman (1927-2012)

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Figure 1. Richard L. Hoffman (ca. 2009). Photo by Rick Dawson.

Virginia recently lost one of its most valuable human resources. Richard Lawrence Hoffman (age 84) died on June 10, 2012, from complications following open heart surgery. His breadth of knowledge and contributions to science on animals ranging from millipeds to insects to worms to amphibians and reptiles, especially in Virginia, will never be matched. He was one of the last old-time naturalists. Many details of his life are reviewed in the biographies by Roble

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(2009) and Mitchell (2009) from which some of the information here is derived.

Richard Hoffman (Figure 1) was born on September 25, 1927, in Clifton Forge and spent his youth exploring the countryside where he developed a strong love of natural history. He almost finished his undergraduate degree in biology in 1950 at the University of Virginia but was unable to complete a freshman math class. He was accepted to graduate school at Cornell University in 1951 where his major professor and the dean accepted his 29 publications as being equivalent to passing the math course (Roble 2009). He completed his Master's degree in Entomology in 1959 but worked at the Radford Arsenal as a chemist when he was not at Cornell or in the field.

Richard obtained his Ph.D. in Zoology in 1960 from Virginia Tech where he wrote his dissertation on the taxonomy of branchiobdellid worms (crayfish commensals). In the same year, he accepted a teaching position at Radford University where he taught numerous biology courses over a 28 year period. He joined the Virginia Museum of Natural History as Curator of Recent Invertebrates in 1989 and held this position until his retirement in 2009. Richard retired only from state service but still came in every day to work on various projects and publications. He is survived by a brother, Hank Hoffman; a daughter, Marian Evans; two sons, Lawrence Hoffman and Carl Hoffman; and grandchildren, Brittany Evans, Brett Evans, Rachel Hoffman, Mary Hoffman, and Ella Hoffman; and a nephew, Robert Hoffman.

Without question, Richard Hoffman was the most knowledgeable person on the natural history of Virginia and the southern Appalachians. His original interest in natural history in his teen years was on herpetology. His scientific contributions began in 1944 at the age of 16 with the publication of several papers on amphibians and reptiles of the Clifton Forge area (Hoffman 1944a, b), as well as 13 nature columns on herps in the local newspaper (Roble and Mitchell 2009). He initially wanted to pursue a career in herpetology but was discouraged by some prominent herpetologists at the time. During his undergraduate years at the University of Virginia, he realized that there was plenty of room for taxonomic contributions on the inver-

tebrates, especially millipeds, present under the same rocks and logs as the herps he found. And although Richard published more than four hundred papers on invertebrates around the world, he never lost his love of the amphibians and reptiles, especially salamanders, of Virginia.

Richard Hoffman published 73 papers on various aspects of the conservation, distribution, and natural history of amphibians and reptiles, almost all of which were based on observations in Virginia (Mitchell 2009). He recognized the two distinctive calls of the gray treefrog complex (*Hyla chrysoscelis* and *H. versicolor*) and outlined their distribution pattern in Virginia two decades before they were recognized as separate species (Hoffman 1946; Johnson 1966). He was the first to note the expansion of the range of *H. chrysoscelis* westward onto the Blue Ridge escarpment in Floyd County (Hoffman 1996). He described two subspecies that were later considered invalid (Six-lined Racerunner [*Aspidoscelis sexlineata*], Seal Salamander [*Desmognathus monticola*]) (Hoffman 1951, 1957a, b). Most of his herpetological contributions were distribution records. He published herp checklists of Alleghany County (Hoffman 1945a), Fort Pickett (Hoffman 1953), Burkes Garden in Tazewell County (Hoffman and Kleinpeter 1948a, Hoffman 1955, 1983), and Mount Rogers (Hoffman and Kleinpeter 1948b). He later summarized all of his observations on the herps of Alleghany County in a four-part series published in *Catesbeiana* (Hoffman 1985a, b, 1986, 1987a). He wrote valuable contributions to natural history conservation in Virginia (Hoffman 1987c) and a much cited review of the geology and natural history of Virginia (Woodward and Hoffman 1991), both of which provided information on amphibians and reptiles. He addressed the amphibian decline problem with a historical review of his observations on amphibians in the Clifton Forge area in an article in *Catesbeiana* (Hoffman 1992b). His final herpetological contribution (Hoffman 2012b) concerns biogeographical issues in Virginia, including a challenge to other herpetologists to document new state records.

Numerous species, as well as several families and genera, of invertebrates bear his name. Also, one salamander was named in his honor – the Valley and Ridge Salamander (*Plethodon hoffmani*) – by

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Richard Highton (1971). Hoffman had collected the type specimen near his home town of Clifton Forge in 1944. Highton (2009) described how the description of the Peaks of Otter Salamander (*Plethodon hubrichti*) that he and Richard were about to publish was underhandedly thwarted by Gordon Thurow (1957). He also discovered the first records of the Coal Skink in Virginia (*Plestiodon anthracinus*, Hoffman 1944a). It was his first paper.

The Virginia Herpetological Society (VHS) was founded in 1958, a year or so before Richard became a member (Mitchell 2009). He maintained his membership in most years until his death. Many of his herpetological contributions were published in the VHS newsletter and the society's journal, *Catesbeiana*, all of which are listed below. The change from an irregularly published newsletter edited by Frank Tobey from 1958 to 1979 (Tobey 1988) to a journal format occurred at a meeting in Longwood College (now University) in 1980. Richard Hoffman suggested the title *Catesbeiana*, honoring Mark Catesby (a 17th century naturalist), for the new journal; it was accepted by unanimous vote of the members present (Figure 2).

Richard also helped JCM create a new journal called *Banisteria*, named after the first university trained naturalist to work in Virginia, John Banister (1650-1692), which focuses on the natural history of the Commonwealth. The first issue was published 300 years after Banister's death (1992). The Virginia Natural History Society was formed about two years later. Numerous papers by Hoffman (usually as sole author) and coauthors, mostly concerning invertebrates, were published in this journal during the next two decades. One was on anuran distribution records in Greensville County (Hoffman and Mitchell 1996) and another on milliped predation on salamander eggs (Mitchell et al. 2009). A symposium was held in honor of Richard Hoffman's 80th birthday in September 2007 at the Virginia Museum of Natural History and resulted in a beautiful edited book that contains 32 papers by 41 authors on four continents (Roble and Mitchell 2009). Richard Hoffman was the true southern gentleman scientist. He was a generous and caring individual who loved Virginia and its natural wealth. He was well known for his zeal to educate anyone who cared to listen. He was an eloquent speaker. Some of his presentations were

compiled the day before or on the spot. Among his many teaching and scientific research awards, are the Virginia Lifetime Achievement Award from the Virginia Museum of Natural History, the Edward H. Abbuehl Award for Environmental Education from the Friends of the Blue Ridge Parkway, and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the VHS. He will be long remembered for his education of many students and colleagues, his scientific contributions to state, regional, and global biodiversity, his love and knowledge of Virginia, his generosity, and his quiet, unassuming but passionate approach to life. JCM last saw Richard in July 2011 when he visited him in Martinsville. Richard was excited to show JCM an insect that he had found in a swimming pool when he took a break from the heat one day (see Hoffman 2012a). It was easy to tell that he had plans for many publications, some of which had been in the works for years. Unfortunately, some of these will never be finished. We have lost one of the most important pillars in Virginia's natural history. Much of the advancement of herpetology in the Commonwealth will be based on the foundations he provided.

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Figure 2. Attendees of the 1980 meeting of the Virginia Herpetological Society in Farmville, Virginia. Left to right: Chris Pague, Richard Hoffman, Bob Bader, Wendy Mitchell (now Robertson) with Joshua, Charlie Hooper, Joe Mitchell, unknown, and Don Merkle. Bader, Hoffman, and Hooper are deceased.