

For Immediate Release

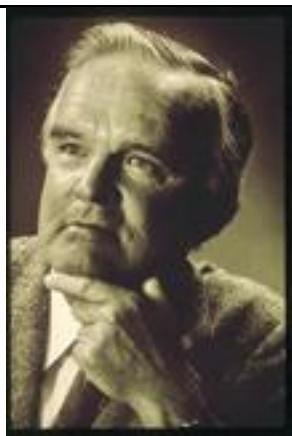
August 22, 2011

Remembering Yorke Edwards, former Director, Royal BC Museum

Victoria, BC – Yorke Edwards, biologist and director of the Royal BC Museum from 1975 to 1984 died on August 16 at age 86.

For almost half a century Yorke Edwards was a pioneer in wildlife biology, nature education, conservation, and museum life, stimulating people to think more deeply about the world and our place in it.

“His commitment to natural history and its interpretation was evident in all he accomplished. We are sad about this loss, particularly for his family, but also for those that worked with him here and elsewhere,” said Royal BC Museum CEO Pauline Rafferty.



Credit: Photo courtesy Royal BC Museum



Credit: Portrait by artist David Lloyd Glover.
Courtesy Royal BC Museum

(Higher resolution image available from the Royal BC Museum)

Roger Yorke Edwards was born in Toronto in 1924. As a youth, along with his friends, John Crosby, Robert Bateman and Bristol Foster (all of whom also become well known in biological circles) he was an enthusiastic member of the Royal Ontario Museum’s Intermediate Naturalists Club. In 1948 he received his bachelor’s degree in forestry at the University of Toronto. He then came to UBC in Vancouver to study with Ian McTaggart Cowan; by 1950 he had his Master’s degree in zoology and botany.

In 1951, Yorke began a challenging job as a research officer with the British Columbia Forest Service in Victoria. In those days, provincial parks were managed by the Forest Service, and

much of his wildlife research was concentrated in places like Manning and Wells Gray parks. Yorke championed a new cause in 1959 – nature interpretation in parks. He talked his superiors in the Forest Service into giving it a try. From meager beginnings it blossomed into a major undertaking. Over the years it brought nature houses, interpretive signs, nature trails, and naturalists talks to most parts of the province. Widely admired, the program set a standard for outdoor education across the country. In 1967 Yorke accepted an invitation from the Canadian Wildlife Service in Ottawa to create the same thing on a national scale. During the following years five Wildlife Centres sprang up across Canada, from Bonaventure in the Gaspé of Quebec to Creston in the Kootenays of BC

Yorke returned to BC in 1972 to become the Assistant Director of the Provincial Museum, and from 1974 to 1984 he was its Director. In the 1960s he had been president of the BC Museums Association and had written and spoken volumes on museums and the museum community. This, along with his museum experience in Toronto, and especially his extensive work in public education, prepared him for managing a major museum. His accomplishments while at the museum included: support for the Museum Train tour of the province from 1975-79; the cross-Canada tour of the First Nations *Legacy* exhibition; publication of several natural history books; the opening of the Natural History gallery in 1979; increasing support for the Friends of the Provincial Museum; beginning the popular Newcombe lecture program; and more.

Yorke served on the executive boards of many conservation and natural history organizations ranging from the Canadian Nature Federation to *Owl* and *Chickadee* magazines, from the BC Forest Museum to the Nature Conservancy of Canada. He won many awards for his dedication to the understanding and preservation of Canadian nature, including the Interpretation Canada Award for Outstanding Achievement, and Canada's 125th Year Medal. He was a Fellow of both the Royal Geographical Society of Canada and the Canadian Museums Association.

The scope of Yorke Edwards' writing is impressive; his publication list includes over 320 entries. Some of his wildlife management papers, especially those based on his studies in Wells Gray Park, are classics. He also wrote widely on birds, but perhaps his most influential works are those dealing with wildlife conservation and park interpretation. He recognized the value of writing for children and worked hard at it. Naturalists' newsletters and magazines are full of his articles, as are journals and books about museums. His book, *The Mountain Barrier*, was a popular treatment of the ecology of the mountains of western Canada.

Dr. Rob Cannings, current Curator of Entomology at the Royal BC Museum and a world expert on dragonflies, knew Yorke well. "While a young wader of ponds and student of nature growing up in the Okanagan, I counted Yorke Edwards among my biologist heroes. He was the inventor of the Parks Branch naturalist programs and their treasured nature houses. At 15 years old I was devastated when Yorke turned down my job application and said I was 'still a bit green.' But I got the job the next year and it was the beginning of what became my life's work. When I started working at the museum in 1980 it was the fulfillment of a dream cherished ever since I'd used the museum's old Handbook No. 2 to identify Long-toed Salamanders. I got the job not because of my relationship but because, under Yorke's influence, I'd become a generalist

in natural history and public education, as well as a specialist in a particular discipline. He will be deeply missed by all who learned from him, as I did.”

Thousands who have worked in – or visited – parks, wildlife centres, and museums, as well as those who have read his articles or heard his talks, will all carry a little bit of Yorke Edwards with them.

-30-

Media contact:

Royal BC Museum Media Enquiries

250-387-3207

news@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca