

**RICHARD EVANS SCHULTES**  
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**A TRIBUTE**

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With the passing of Dick Schultes the Society for Economic Botany has lost one of its staunchest supporters who was the editor of this journal from 1962 to 1979. He was the Society's Distinguished Economic Botanist for 1979. Although the term ethnobotany was coined as early as 1895 by John Harshberger, Schultes can rightfully be called "The Father of Modern Ethnobotany." No single person has done more research in the field personally nor encouraged more people to enter the field of ethnobotany than Dick Schultes. At the 2001 meeting of the Society for Economic Botany in Honolulu it was amazing how many people acknowledged a Schultes connection of some sort. I am one of them. As a young botanist working in Amazonia I mentioned to Dick that I had been collecting plants in Yanomami Indian Territory and had observed their use of *Virola* as a hallucinogen. He immediately responded by asking me to write this up immediately for publication in *Economic Botany*. I explained that I was a systematist, not an ethnobotanist, but he insisted and before long I had a paper accepted for this journal (Prance 1970). With his encouragement, I began to make numerous ethnobotanical observations on my expeditions and to have the privilege of getting to know Schultes at meetings and on trips (Fig. 1). I have only worked in ethnobotany because of the urging of Dick Schultes. He had many students who studied with him and became well-known ethnobotanists such as Michael Balick, Robert Bye, Wade Davis, Tommie Lockwood, Timothy Plowman, Doel Soejarto and Andrew Weil to name a few, but he was an inspiration to many other people who never studied formally with him because he

was always generous with his time and advice. A visit to the Botanical Museum at Harvard was always a treat because of the amount of time that Dick would spend with one. He obviously enjoyed his role as a teacher and encourager. There are not many major professors who have had one of their students write a book about them, but naturally this has happened for Dick Schultes in the most entertaining book, *One River* by Wade Davis (1996). If you want to learn more about Dick's adventures in the Amazon region this is where to go.

I must recount how I first met Dick Schultes. It was during a symposium on the Amazon Biota held at Belém, Brazil in 1966. I do not remember how I, as a very junior post-doctoral botanist, managed to be at the same table at dinner in the famous restaurant there in the military fort. Perhaps it was because Dick was such an Anglophile? However, we were having a very jolly time and I was mainly listening to the wisdom of the gurus who were at my table. The beer flowed abundantly and it so happened that Dick and I needed to relieve ourselves of it at the same time. We were both in full stream at the urinal when Dick jumped back shouting "Oh my God." There had been a tarantula spider on the wall at the crucial height. Fortunately it did not jump towards Dick. We returned to the table and by that time Dick had recovered from the shock and was mirthfully recounting a good embellished story. We became good friends ever since that incident. It was a fortunate encounter for a young botanist, and thanks to a tarantula!

Dick started his work on ethnobotany as a Harvard University undergraduate with a study of the use of peyote by the Kiowa Indians of Oklahoma. His postgraduate thesis was a study of sacred plants in Oaxaca, Mexico and in 1941 he obtained his doctorate from Harvard. Most of his professional career was at Harvard after his

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**Fig. 1.** Prof. Richard Evans Schultes enjoying a taste of *paella* in Cordoba, Spain (photo by G. T. Prance).

long absence in the Amazon region of Colombia. He returned to Harvard from the Amazon in 1953 to become Curator of the Oakes Ames Orchid Herbarium, in 1967, Curator of Economic Botany and in 1970 Director of the Botanical Museum and Edward Jeffrey Professor of Biology. A grant from the National Academy of Sciences took him to the Amazon region in 1941 to study curare, which at that time was just becoming of importance in medicine. His collection of more than 70 plants involved in curares made an invaluable contribution to knowledge about this complex mixture of plants used as arrow poisons in Amazonia. As a consequence of this work, he was in South America when World War II broke out. When he eventually reported to the US Embassy in Bogotá, Colombia, he was given an appropriate war assignment to study and collect rubber seeds in Amazonia. The supply of natural rubber from plantations in Malaysia was cut off by the Japanese occupation of that region and so Dick and other botanists were

sent off to collect seeds and herbarium specimens of *Hevea*. The result was that Dick spent 12 continuous years in Amazonia, much of it amongst indigenous peoples, which established him as the undisputed authority on the ethnobotany and floristic diversity of the Northwestern Amazon. This really fulfilled a dream, as his interest in exploration and in the Amazon region was stimulated when, at the age six, he was seriously ill and his parents read to him 'Notes of a Botanist on the Amazon and Andes' by Richard Spruce who became his hero and his inspiration. In 1970 he wrote a foreword to a reprint edition of Spruce's book and later several articles about him. He also helped to raise funds for the restoration of the headstone of Spruce's grave in Yorkshire, England. I well remember a 1992 visit in the company of Dick Schultes and other botanists who attended a meeting to celebrate the life and work of Spruce to the small village of Ganthorpe where Spruce was born. Dick was in his element and showed what an intimate knowledge he had gained about the life of Spruce. Dick eventually became one of the few overseas botanists to have spent longer in the Amazon than his hero Richard Spruce. He also chalked up as many adventures and faced as many dangers and illnesses as Spruce.

Dick's interest in Richard Spruce was in keeping with his Anglophile interests. After his initial work in Oklahoma he hardly acknowledged the United States West of the Hudson River and was closely linked to his life in New England and his interests in the United Kingdom. One of his great loves was the Linnean Society of London of which he was a fellow since 1950 and was elected to the honour of Foreign Member in 1987. He was also proud to have been one of the few Americans to receive the Linnean Society's gold medal for botany, which was awarded to him in 1992. I received a constant supply of nomination forms to fellowship of the Linnean Society to second the proposals for membership made by Dick. He was one of the best recruiters to the Society. He was known for using the "proper" English spelling of words in all of his writings. Among many British friends of the Schultes family was Patrick Brenan, one of my predecessors as Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. The Brenans and the Schultes exchanged children for visits to each other's homes.

The Linnean Society was just one of many

organizations that honoured Dick Schultes. His various honours are too many to list, but being awarded the Cruz de Boyacá from President Betancur of Colombia, the Gold Medal of World Wildlife Fund from H. R. H. Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, election to the scientific academies of Colombia, Argentina, India, The National Academy of Sciences and the Third World Academy of Sciences all showed that his recognition was worldwide. He received the Tyler Ecology Prize in 1987 in recognition for his work on the ethnopharmacological conservation of Amazonia and in 1994 he was a laureate of the Global 500 Forum of the United Nations Environmental Programme. The Colombian government named a 226 000 acre protected area of Amazonian forest "Sector Schultes."

Much attention has been given to Dick's work on hallucinogenic and narcotic plants and he was an undisputed world authority in that area. However, he also did much research in other areas, as can be seen in the bibliography which follows. His book on medicinal plants of the upper Amazon, *The Healing Forest* (Schultes and Raffauf 1992), is a classic reference on medicinal plants of the Northwest of Amazonia that describes the uses of 1600 species in local medicine. Because of his early assignment to collect seeds of rubber he also became a leading authority on the rubber genus *Hevea*. It is a great pity that he did not remain well enough towards the end of his life to complete his monograph of that genus, although he published a number of papers on rubber. Following in the footsteps of his mentor and predecessor at the Botanical Museum of Harvard he also published many papers about orchids. In other words Dick Schultes was an "all rounder" as we say in England. His work on ethnobotany was so successful because of his friendly and courteous way of treating native peoples. In a 1992 article about Schultes he is quoted as saying, "I do not believe in hostile Indians. All that is required to bring out their gentlemanliness is reciprocal gentlemanliness." This obviously worked well for Dick who took the trouble to learn a lot of the Witoto and Makuna languages. He was a true gentleman and he expected gentlemanliness in return. On the one hand very conservative in his political view and on the other a libertarian who spoke out freely on individual freedom and personal choice on such issues as religion, sexual orientation, abortion and the use of drugs.

Dick was also a major collector of herbarium specimens of the flora of northwestern Amazonia having collected more than 24 000 numbers. From these over 300 have been described as new and more than 60 of these bear the specific epithets "schultesii" or "schultesiana." He is also commemorated by the plant genera *Schultesiophytum*, *Schultesianthus* and *Resia* and a genus of cockroach *Schultesia*. His collections are extremely important for anyone studying Amazonian plants.

We will all miss Richard Evans Schultes greatly, but the best way in which we can continue to honour this giant of ethnobotany is to see that this discipline continues to flourish and also to promote the conservation of his beloved Amazonian rainforest, something Dick was doing long before it became fashionable so to do.

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