

Obituary

DR LYNDSAY MCLAREN FORSTER: 1925-2009

Lyndsay (Lyn) McLaren Forster (né Clifford) was born on September 19, 1925 in Wallaceville, Upper Hutt. She died on January 20, 2009, aged 83, at Birchleigh Hospital, Mosgiel, after suffering a series of debilitating strokes in 2000. Lyn is survived by four children, two grandchildren and her younger sister. Her husband, Ray Forster, passed away in 2000 (see Patrick et al. 2000).

Lyn grew up on a small fruit and dairy farm near Feilding and was the elder of two daughters. At a time when female education was not as valued as it is now, Lyn graduated from high school before going on to Victoria University College (now Victoria University) in Wellington. It was there in 1945, as an undergraduate student, that she met Ray Forster. Lyn and Ray were married on December 11, 1948 at St. Peter's Church in Wellington and honeymooned by going on a camping field trip. Lyn did not complete her degree at Victoria and moved to Christchurch in 1948 where Ray was Zoologist and Assistant Director of the Canterbury Museum. In 1957 Lyn and Ray moved to Dunedin where Ray had been appointed Director of the Otago Museum.

Ever dedicated to her family, Lyn put raising her children ahead of her personal scientific interests and did not resume her university studies until the late 1960s, which culminated, in 1979, with a Ph.D. at the University of Otago. Her thesis was entitled "On Comparative Aspects of the Behavioural Biology of some New Zealand Jumping Spiders" and Lyn published several papers on visual and seismic communication in this family (Salticidae). Unlike most spiders, jumping spiders are regarded as strongly visually oriented animals, yet in a pioneering study, Lyn was the first to experimentally demonstrate a role for mechanoreception in their behaviour (Forster 1982a). Recognition of Lyn's expertise in salticid behaviour led to her being invited to contribute chapters to two books on the subject (Forster 1982b, 1985). Lyn also published several papers on *Latrodectus hasseltii* (the Australian redback spider), after they were discovered in Central Otago in 1980 and published the first description of the stereotyped behaviour of sexual cannibalism in any species (Forster 1992). A *Wild South* documentary brought this work to the attention of a wider audience by filming, under Lyn's supervision, a male redback spider flipping over to expose its abdomen to the fangs of a female during mating. In the late 1990s Lyn edited and distributed an electronic newsletter, "Spider News", to readers interested in araneological matters from New Zealand and elsewhere.



Lyn was a tutor and a lecturer for the Zoology Department at the University of Otago on numerous occasions, and also helped create and design many educational displays at the Otago Museum in what is now named the Forster Hall. For many years, Lyn was actively involved in the Otago Institute, also known as the Otago Branch of the Royal Society of New Zealand. She was elected honorary secretary in 1982; in 1990 she was elected President (the first woman in that position), and in 1991, she was elected an Honorary Life Member. Lyn was also consulted by the Ministry of Health for her expertise on white-tailed spiders (*Lampona* spp.) and redback spiders. Lyn's skills were not confined to the worlds of science and academia. After becoming involved with the Girl Scout movement while the Forster family stayed in Hawaii, Lyn later became Divisional Commissioner for the Otago Girl Guides.

In 1987, Lyn and Ray moved from St Clair to a large property on Saddle Hill on the outskirts of Dunedin. Out of concern for the future of forest remnants, they covenanted a substantial forest on their property and encouraged people to explore this forest and study its fauna and flora. Lyn's warm and generous hospitality will be fondly remembered by the many visitors to the Forster residence over the years. Visitors and correspondents alike will also recall the encouragement she gave to anyone interested in spiders.

Lyn and Ray Forster were a true partnership. If Ray were with us today, we are sure he would be the first to admit he could not have accomplished what he did without Lyn's unstinting support. While Lyn made a valuable contribution to science in her own right, she is perhaps best known to the wider public through her popular collaborations with Ray, best exemplified by

their books "New Zealand Spiders: an Introduction" (Forster & Forster 1973) and "Spiders of New Zealand and their Worldwide Kin" (Forster & Forster 1999). This latter work would not have been completed without Lyn's drive and determination to see the project through. Visitors to the Forster's at the time may recall Lyn carefully checking page layouts on a large table in the front room. In November 1999, despite ill health, both Lyn and Ray attended the launch of the book, their last publication. While it was Lyn's last work, it was a fitting end to her career and is likely to be the definitive reference work on New Zealand spiders for many years to come.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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