

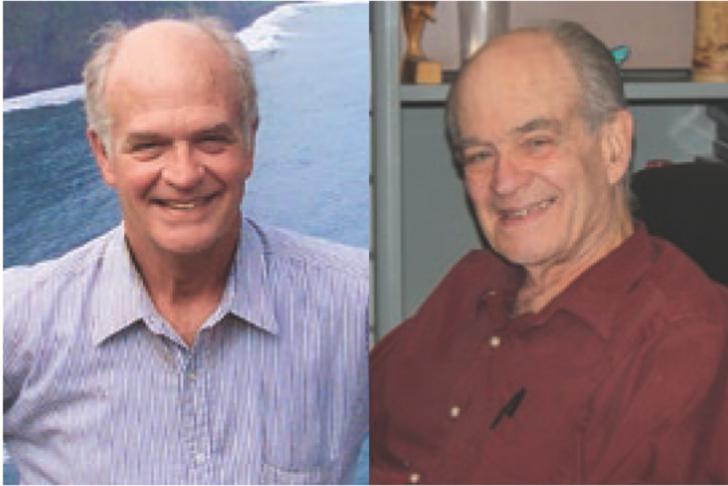
IN MEMORIAM:
STEPHEN DOUGLAS KOCH OLT (16 DECEMBER 1940–14 JANUARY 2017)

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Stephen Douglas Koch. Photo on left by Nicolas Koch. Photo on right by María Flores.

Stephen Douglas Koch Olt was born in New York City on December 16, 1940 and died on January 14, 2017 in Tepetlaoxtoc, Mexico State, Mexico. He was a distinguished plant systematist and taxonomist, specializing in grasses.

He obtained his Bachelor's degree with honors in Arts (AB) at Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, USA in 1962 and his Master's degree and Ph.D. in Botany at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1964 and 1969 respectively. At the University of Michigan, he served as curatorial assistant and assistant professor. Later, he worked as an Instructor at Duke University, and as assistant professor at the University of North Carolina from 1968 to 1973. His focus was on grasses, particularly the genera *Festuca*, *Eragrostis*, and *Trisetum*. During these years, he went on extensive expeditions to Mexico where he developed his passion for and an interest in the plants of the country.

Responding to an invitation from Dr. Josué Kohashi Shibata, he arrived in Mexico to become a full professor at the nascent botany program at the Colegio de Postgraduados (a Postgraduate College for agricultural sciences) in October of 1973. His wife, Carol Anna Koch, arrived with him. They had three children, Benjamin, Nicolas, and Oliver. His wife and one son, Nicolas, survive him. He had a reserved personality and talked little about his personal life and, avoided social commitments whenever he could. However, his attitude changed whenever academic subjects came up. He shared his knowledge willingly and extensively during fieldwork, in

his classes, and when assisting and supervising students. His opinions were pointed at times, but he would extensively explain topics until the student or colleague understood.

Upon his arrival at the Colegio de Postgraduados, in 1973, he founded the Herbarium-Hortorio (CHAPA), and served as its curator until his death. The collection began with a few specimens as a teaching collection but soon increased with a gift of 500 specimens from Dr. Efraim Hernández Xolocotzi, a colleague at the Botany Program.

As research professor and curator of the Herbarium, he developed the academic program that defined his career and prestige as a grass taxonomist. Stephen D. Koch devoted much of his time to field work. It was an activity he enjoyed and it also helped the project of his life, the herbarium, to grow. He maintained friendships and continuous collaboration with Roger McVaugh, Paul A. Fryxell, and William R. Anderson; Paul Fryxell dedicated *Hibiscus kochii* to him.

He was very dedicated. After field trips he carefully saw to it that the specimens were correctly identified, cleanly mounted, and well-documented and labeled. He also made sure the visitors treated the specimens with care. Type specimens were especially valuable and kept separated from the main collection.

Stephen Koch continually oversaw the growth of this herbarium, through his own collections, the collections of his and other students, colleagues and through an intensive exchange program with Mexican and international herbaria. He also maintained close contact with these institutions and their staff. Today, the Herbarium-Hortorio (CHAPA) is a recognized mid-sized collection of 160,000 specimens that can be visited and consulted. Grasses are particularly well-represented. It also has a good representation of cultivated plants, which makes it an exception among most herbaria (this is why Hortorio is included in the name). In recent years, he initiated the digitalization of the collection with the help of CONABIO (Comisión Nacional para el Conocimiento y Uso de la Biodiversidad).

In an annex to the herbarium, he also assembled a taxonomic library. He had subscriptions for the important botanical journals [a regular subscriber to *Sida* and *JBRIT*, editor] and continually purchased new literature. He also collaborated with several flora projects, such as the Flora Mesoamericana and the Consejo Nacional de la Flora de México, mainly in the 1980s, and with several national and international journals as editor and reviewer.

He is author of more than 40 scientific papers, four books and eleven book chapters. He described 43 new species, mainly of the family Poaceae, but some from the Malvaceae, Rubiaceae, and Turneraceae. His abbreviation is S.D. Koch. He was also a member of the Mexican Academy of Sciences and of the National Academy of Agricultural Sciences of Mexico.

From the beginning of his career, he taught Advanced Systematic Botany. Later, he designed a complementary course, Applied Botany, which focused on the techniques required for working with plants, herbaria, and their taxonomy. He also participated in various courses and workshops on herbarium techniques, grass taxonomy, and similar subjects. He supervised more than 30 undergraduate, master's and doctoral theses, participated in scientific meetings, and attended numerous invitations for talks at other institutions.

Professor Koch arrived in our country at a young age and with much enthusiasm. This allowed him to develop this life project and to leave an important inheritance, both physically—the herbarium and his publications—and in the meticulous education of the numerous students of his courses. The Mexican botanical community has lost an important taxonomist and expert in grasses. He will live among us through his work and his contribution to the knowledge of the Mexican flora.

Rest in peace!

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REFERENCE

GÓMEZ-SÁNCHEZ, M. 2017. Stephen Douglas Koch Olt (1940–2017). *Act. Bot. Mex.* 119:21–24.