

Dr. Stephen Darbyshire is our next member profile. He recently retired from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in Ottawa where he's been working as a research in plant taxonomy with a focus on weeds since 1994. Prior to that he joined AAFC in 1980 as a research assistant in the Biosystematics Research Institute. In the profile below you'll get to know more about Dr. Darbyshire and he presents some of the most quotable answers in his profile that we've seen yet!

How did you become involved with CWSS and when?

I first began attending the Expert committee on Weeds meetings in 1995 in Montreal. With no idea what it was all about, I was encouraged to attend by my AAFC colleague Cliff Crompton. Cliff and I drove to Montreal through a horrendous snowstorm which had me questioning whether I was going to survive the first meeting, on several levels.



What has the extent of your involvement been?

From 1995 until 2018 I have attended ECW/CWSS-SCM meetings yearly, missing only 2 or 3. Committee work has been scattered over the years. Contributions to the Local Arrangements Committees (Ottawa 1999, Victoria 2006) were the most interesting since there were so many aspects to deal with. In the "old days" there was a working group called "Provincial Reports" where involvement offered very useful opportunities for contacts and information relevant to my work. This group has changed over the years to become a meeting session focused more on weed regulation, extension and ecology, including both typical agricultural weeds and environmentally invasive species. It now also includes federal participation as CFIA has become an important player in the regulatory aspects of vegetation management. The communications committee is another group with which I was involved for a few years. It is hard to imagine that in 1995 there was, for most people, no Internet. For six years I served as publications director on the board, succeeding Eric Johnson. This position involved overview of all the CWSS-SCM related publications including the Newsletter, Topics in Canadian Weed Science and the Biology of Canadian Weeds series. This time of change CWSS-SCM was evaluating its publication activities in addressing its goals and trying to deliver maximum benefits to the membership.

I guess the take home message from these experiences is that, even in its short life time society activities have changed greatly. Part of the changes have been internally driven and some driven by external factors. But the value of the relevance of the society has been maintained through the attention and efforts of many committed members with diverse interests and expertise. Not everyone need serve as president, but the more one puts in the more one benefits.

Favorite memory/experience in your weed science career to date?

Taxonomy is often viewed as a rather esoteric and not very useful pursuit. After all, as long as one knows how to kill the pest what does the name matter? Ultimately the name matters for

communication. As the oft quoted Carl Linnaeus said, "the knowledge of things perishes by the ignorance of their names."

It is the service of identification of "unknown" plants for others that has been the most satisfying aspect of the career. Finding an unknown weed is like being presented with a complete mystery, but a name provides the key word to "Google". Basically this is just extension work helping others with their problems.

What is your favorite weed and why?

There are so many weeds that are fascinating, but my favourites have always been the grasses. There is no other family of plants as important in its relationship with humans and civilization. Their evolutionary trajectory of morphological simplification stands in contrast to their incredible diversity. The paradox of superficial similarity versus multifariousness of function and ecology has always been intriguing.

What are your career goals/future plans in weed science?

Although I am now retired from AAFC, my interest in plants and weeds has not abated. A number of projects are still active and new ones are always presenting themselves. The curse of being curious is that the world remains interesting and questions never end.