Long ago, as one of us (CJB) started research towards a PhD dissertation on the population cytogenetics of some South American grasshoppers, he had already been strongly influenced by the first Spanish translation (by Francisco A. Sáez, 1951, the pioneer of orthopteran cytogenetics in South America) of Michael White’s ‘Animal Cytology and Evolution’ (1945). CJB had also been fortunate to attend lectures on chromosomes by Sáez, and Sáez had been fascinated by a lecture delivered by Clarence McClung on grasshopper chromosomes at La Plata University (Argentina) in the late twenties of the 20th century. Sáez was a friend of Michael White’s; they had met at the 12th International Congress of Genetics (Tokyo). CJB will always remember a photograph kept in the room of his major professor, Juan H. Hunziker, at Buenos Aires University, in which Michael White, Francisco Sáez, Theodossius Dobzhansky and Bruce Wallace enjoy a good time in Japan.

In 1982 CJB travelled to Maracay, Venezuela to an international entomological meeting. Michael White was one of the outstanding featured speakers and CJB was eager to meet the man in person. Unfortunately, Michael did not appear. By that time, he had been stricken by the liver cancer that shortly afterwards caused his death, at the height of his extraordinary career. Unaware of Michael’s health problems, CJB had prompted E.R. Hasson to send our new manuscript on Leptysma argentina population cytogenetics (Bidaú & Hasson 1984) to Michael, in order to get an expert evaluation before trying to publish. Michael’s comments and criticisms were invaluable and the paper was published shortly after; the letter and his kind comments on our beginners’ manuscript will never be forgotten.

At that time, CJB had bought, with his meagre doctoral student income, both essential books by White: the third edition of ‘Animal Cytology and Evolution’ in its 1977 paperback edition and ‘Modes of Speciation’ (1978). Attracted, as so many others, by White’s clear and didactic writing style, even when discussing the more complicated cytogenetic and evolutionary problems, CJB too had been captured by the stasispatial model of speciation created by White. That same year, CJB met Godfrey M. Hewitt, who had been a visiting researcher at the Australian National University at White’s Department, and orthopterists and cytogeneticists Alejo Mesa and Amilson Ferreira, both having been students of White at Melbourne. Through them, CJB felt closer to this admired biologist.

When CJB moved to Misiones National University to lead an evolutionary genetics team, the younger of us (DAM) was an undergraduate, who quickly became fascinated by the intricacies of what was (and still is) our main orthopteran cytogenetic model for population cytogenetic studies (Bidaú & Martí 2002): the melano-line Dichroplus pratensis. On this species he later developed his PhD thesis and published his first scientific work on female meiosis. We agree that Michael White’s enduring influence has moulded to a great extent, our thinking on cytogenetic and evolutionary matters. Yet one more evidence of our acknowledgment is Michael White’s portrait, hanging in our laboratory for many years, along with that of Prof. Ricardo Ronceros, founding member and past president of the Orthopterists’ Society. For these reasons, it is an honor and great pleasure for us, that through the generosity of the Orthopterists’ Society, its President María Marta Cigliano and JOR Editor Glenn K. Morris, we are able to pay homage to the extraordinary work of this great scientist. Our colleagues, some of whom were friends or students of Michael’s, and others indirectly influenced by his work, have all to be commended for their excellent collaboration that jointly has produced this special section that we feel Michael would have liked. We now briefly comment on each contribution and its relation to Michael White’s scientific interests.

The life of Michael James Denham White was marked not only by itinerant and fruitful scientific achievement but also by adventures. White worked in many countries and institutions and influenced the cytogenetic, biological and evolutionary thinking of many scientists around the world, either directly through his students and collaborators, or indirectly through his publications and books; these books well summarized an incredible amount of knowledge about the chromosomes of animals (White 1973a,b; 1978). Peacock and McCann’s (2010) biography clearly demonstrates White’s qualities as scientist, his vast output that was not limited to grasshoppers, but extended to orthopteroids in general, to vertebrates, and also impressive studies on Cecidomyiidae (White 1950).

White loved Italy where he had spent most of his boyhood between 1915 and 1927. Throughout his academic life he returned many times to that country where he established solid scientific ties and was elected to the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, an honor he especially appreciated. White’s last (posthumous) paper was published in Italy (White 1985). In this context Prof. Ernesto Capanna writes here about his friendship with White, whose influence was decisive at the onset of Capanna’s distinguished career in cytogenetics and evolution (Capanna 2010). Capanna’s short paper shows in an affectionate way, the man and friend behind the famous scientist.

Michael White’s distinguished career spanned more than 50 y of the biological history of the twentieth century; he lived from a time when problems that today seem matter-of-fact were then controversial and actively discussed (e.g., crossing over and chiasmata), through the birth of the modern evolutionary synthesis, to which he contributed through the publication in 1945 of the first edition of ‘Animal Cytology and Evolution’. In his last years, he saw the impact of chromosome-banding techniques on the evolutionary study of chromosomes, and the beginnings of molecular cytogenetics (White et al. 1981, 1982). In this issue, Bidaú and Martí (2010) examine the