

Thomas Drake Eichlin (1938–2013)

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Source: The Journal of the Lepidopterists' Society, 69(3) : 238-240

Published By: The Lepidopterists' Society

URL: <https://doi.org/10.18473/lepi.69i3.a1>

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THOMAS DRAKE EICHLIN (1938–2013)



Tom Eichlin examining larval specimens in the CDFA diagnostic collection. Photograph by Charles S. Papp

Dr. Tom Eichlin built his legacy with the depth of his knowledge of the systematics of his beloved clearwing moth family Sesiidae, as well as with his acumen in diagnosing Lepidoptera problems for the state of California.

Born in Easton, Pennsylvania on September 21, 1938, Tom attended Indiana University of Pennsylvania and received his PhD at Auburn University. His research in graduate school was on plusiine loopers of the family Noctuidae working along with his major professor, Dr. H.B. Cunningham. Their work was published in 1978. This research also resulted in his becoming a specialist in the identification of the caterpillars in this group.

A presidential fellowship that took Dr. Eichlin to the Smithsonian Institution in the 1970s was a turning point in his career, as his work with Dr. W. Donald Duckworth moved him squarely into what became his research passion: the clearwing moths of the Sesiidae. Tom moved to Sacramento in 1974 to begin a thirty-year career as a biosystematist with the California Department of Food and Agriculture, Plant Pest Diagnostics Laboratory (CDFA, PPD). He continued his research program on the systematics of Sesiidae while performing his duties to identify threats to California's agricultural economy.

In 1988 Duckworth and Eichlin authored "The Moths of America North of Mexico, Fascicle 5.1 SESIOIDEA, Sesiidae". While the MONA Fascicle was the major conclusion of their studies of North American sesiids, two publications by the authors in the California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA)

Occasional Papers in Entomology were very significant and a source of pride to Dr. Eichlin. "A Classification of the Sesiidae . . ." (1977) cleared up most of the confusion created by Engelhardt's 1946 sesiid monograph. This gave clearwing moth studies a sound nomenclatural and classification framework for future studies. "The Clearwing Moths of California . . ." (1978) emphasized an important piece the entire North American sesiid fauna and helped Tom fulfill his obligations to CDFA.

A consummate collaborator, Dr. Eichlin maintained research activities with chemists, insect physiologists, and applied entomologists to clarify the sesiid chemical communication system that had been established during the early stages of his studies at the Smithsonian. He identified many new species across the New World and expanded the distribution ranges of many known North American sesiid species. Tom also participated in many of the CDFA eradication programs including the Gypsy Moth Project, Africanized Honey Bees, and multiple Medfly projects.

Dr. Eichlin loved the field and was an enthusiastic collector. He did two very productive field trips with Duckworth collecting sesiids across the southern half of Arizona and from El Paso, Texas through New Mexico and Colorado. He also made many other trips to Mexico, including Baja California with Fred Andrews over the years. During his tenure at CDFA, Tom expanded on and curated the Lepidoptera collection, which includes the earlier contributions of Hartford H. Keifer, William "Bill" Bauer, J.S. "Steve" Buckett, and

others. His curation and specimens contributed an integral part of the California Collection of Insects and Arthropods at the PPDL in Sacramento. Dr. Eichlin was a founding member of the California Association of Professional Scientists, a union representing scientists that are state government employees, and as a member of the Lepidopterists' Society served as editor of its journal between 1981 and 1985.

Tom's joviality could fill a room and his personable style was well received at workshops, which he gave throughout the state on gypsy moth and other Lepidoptera of concern. He was well respected by county entomologists whom he gladly assisted in diagnosing the latest infestations. Tom enjoyed morning walks with his golden retriever as well as fly-fishing for trout on expeditions with family and friends. While fishing he always had a sesiid pheromone strip attached to his hat and an insect net close at hand. Dr. Eichlin was a proud supporter of the Auburn Tigers football team and coached youth soccer for many years. His favorite vacation location was Yellowstone National Park.

Dr. Eichlin authored or coauthored 50 publications, the last to be completed by 2016. Tom spent his retirement years in Gilbert, Arizona close to members of his immediate family where he battled his lifelong nemesis diabetes. He continued to correspond with and assist numerous collectors and entomologists, sharing his extensive knowledge and expertise while working toward completing a review of the Sesiidae of Mexico when he died on September 19, 2013.

Dr. Tom Eichlin is survived by sons Eric and Karl, and grandchildren Katelynn, Drake, Crystal, and Brooke. His wife, Kathryn, preceded him in death in 2013.

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Submitted for publication 9 May 2015; revised and accepted 15 May 2015.