

2013 IAVS Honorary Member J. Bastow Wilson

By Susan Wiser

J. Bastow Wilson began his education at Miss Muriel Pink's infants' school, the Victoria Preparatory School, in Basingstoke, where perhaps he developed at an early age his infatuation with lawns. He went on to receive his B.Sc. with Class I Honours



at the University College of Wales in 1966. He stayed on at the College and was awarded his Ph.D in 1970. This was followed by an ICI (Imperial Chemical Industries) postdoctoral fellowship at Hartley Botanical Laboratories, University of Liverpool from 1969-1971. In 1971 Bastow took up an appointment in the Botany Department, University of Otago. Bastow is now an Emeritus Professor at the University of Otago and a Research Associate at the Crown Research Institute, Landcare Research Ltd. Bastow has also had a long-term association with cats, which anyone can get to know from his website.

Contributions to Vegetation Science

Bastow is an innovative and extremely productive ecologist who has published in numerous diverse disciplines and made seminal contributions in many of them. These disciplines span community ecology, coastal and marine ecology, applied ecology, conservation ecology, descriptive ecology, biogeography, population genetics and evolution, taxonomy and whole-plant physiology. Bastow is perhaps best known for devising and applying elegant statistical methods to test central assumptions in plant ecology that no one previously had thought to or known how to test. This approach has effectively forced a rethinking of how to study plant communities and Bastow continues to lead the charge. The approach has been most apparent in his work on species coexistence and niche structure. For example, he was so bold as to question the conceptual underpinnings of the entire field of plant community ecology by asking whether communities show any more structure than might be found by chance alone. It is astounding that no one had previously thought to test this essential assumption of our field in a quantitatively rigorous fashion. In a surprisingly elegant series of experiments and statistical analyses, Bastow sought assembly rules for plant communities and found remarkably little evidence for such structure. This work has forced a dramatic re-evaluation of plant community ecology as a field, and applications of Bastow's approach appear with considerable frequency. His papers are routinely novel, quantitative, and formative, and are usually cited widely in the international literature. Some of his most significant insights are derived from research on the University of Otago Botany Department lawn. One of Bastow's trademarks is his originality; he rarely has traditional views on anything in ecology.

Bastow has a prodigious publication record: in the course of his career he has published over 220 peer-reviewed papers and book chapters and has an H index of 35. In New Zealand he has received the most prestigious recognition of science achievement by being elected to be a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand. In short, Bastow is one of the leading plant

ecologists in world and is widely respected for both his scientific contributions and his leadership and service within the field.

Services to IAVS

When JVS was founded in 1980 (and AVS in 1998), the founders were quick to ask Bastow to serve on the editorial boards. In 1995 he became an Associate editor for JVS and he has been an Associate Editor of AVS since its inception. In a major reorganization in 1999 precipitated by Eddy van der Maarel's retirement, Bastow was promoted again, this time to the board of four Chief Editors who oversee the journals. Very quickly his vision, energy, dedication, and good judgment resulted to his promotion in 2000 to the ultimate position of Chair of the Chief Editors (cf. Editor-in-Chief). He has been described as being more active and effective than any other chief editor. He has helped to shape the direction of the field by vigorously exercising his editorial judgment to build the significance and impact of the journals. He has also been an active contributor to the content of the journals via provocative, humorous, and insightful editorials and ~25 research papers in JVS. On a more personal level, I found him to be especially supportive during the period when I served as an Associate editor for JVS; he was always willing to address any concerns I had and was especially supportive on those rare occasions when I had to deal with particularly grumpy authors.

Collaborations, students and service

Bastow has supervised at least 21 Ph.D. students and 6 M.Sc. students. He has also supervised 101 undergraduate honours students.

Bastow maintains active collaborations with scientists all over the world, including numerous collaborations in New Zealand but also outside of NZ in Australia, the UK, Sweden, the US, Chile, Spain, Austria, France, Italy, Fiji and Germany.

He founded and has provided continuous leadership to the Botanical Society of Otago, which provides a mechanism for outreach to botanists outside the University, and to the community. He has provided advice and support to guide decision making on environmentally controversial development proposals. In the 1970s he wrote the software 'Teddybear' to provide a general-purpose program for carrying out probabilistic tests that was used in all the NZ universities and relevant research organisations. A previous Head Statistician at the Invermay Research Station said 'It has changed my life'.

Finally, Bastow is unorthodox and idiosyncratic and continues to make all of us think and keeps us on our toes. His commitment to the field of vegetation science and IAVS in particular makes me proud to present the IAVS Honorary Membership award to him today.