

Maxine Watson

Maxine Watson, Professor of Biology, is retiring this year [2014] after 33 years of service to Indiana University. Maxine was born and raised in New York City and went on to do her undergraduate work at Cornell, in upstate New York. It was there she developed an interest in plant biology. Following her undergraduate work, she moved to Yale University for graduate studies where she received her PhD under the guidance of the renowned ecologist, G. Evelyn Hutchinson. Stephen J. Gould declared G. Evelyn Hutchinson **THE** most important ecologist of the twentieth century and E. O. Wilson pronounced him "one of the few scientists who could unabashedly be called a genius." Clearly Maxine had an outstanding mentor and unique background for her subsequent academic career.

Following her PhD, Maxine accepted a faculty position in the Department of Biology at the University of Utah. But after several years, she moved to Indiana University in 1980 and has been here ever since rising through the ranks to become Full Professor. Maxine has had an active and productive research career. Her interests were broad but are related by a longstanding focus on how plant development interacts with local environmental conditions to affect plant traits such as vegetative form and flower number, and their consequent effects on the population. She has maintained a particular focus on the development of clonal organisms, demonstrating that decisions about the fate of buds in woodland spring ephemerals were determined at their formation in the previous fall. Her highly original conceptual framework, combined with a series of elegant experiments, stimulated the development of a dynamic new research area in developmental plant ecology. Past referees for her promotion to Full Professor made such statements as "Watson's work and intellectual influence have had an international impact on the fields of plant population biology and evolutionary ecology" while another referee wrote that Dr. Watson is "one of the truly original thinkers in the field" who has had "a very large impact in plant evolutionary ecology, physiological ecology and related disciplines".

Her research record is also reflected by her success in training graduate students and post-docs. In total, Maxine graduated six PhD students (with one additional student finishing up) and nine Masters students. She also has had a large number of post-docs, many international, pass through her lab. Many of her past post-docs have gone on to top academic institutions in the US, The Netherlands and Finland. Her international impacts are reflected by her most recent Masters student, Immaculate Kyampeire, from Kenya, and her own sabbatical and visiting scientist travels to institutions in France, Wales, The Netherlands and New Zealand.

Separate from her research activities, Maxine has contributed to the mission of Indiana University through teaching a variety of courses in population biology, ecology and physiology, and through her substantial service activities. For example, from 1988 through 1992 she served as Associate Dean for Graduate Education in the College of Arts and Sciences and more recently has served as the Associate Dean in the University Graduate School, where she lead a number of special initiatives such as post-doctoral affairs and the McNair Scholars Program.

In addition to her substantial research, teaching and service activities, Maxine raised two wonderful daughters, Julia and Hue (pronounced “whey”). Hue, who is currently an Indiana University student, was originally from Vietnam where, several years ago, Maxine and Hue had the opportunity for extensive travels. Julia currently lives in Oregon.

Maxine has enjoyed a productive academic career and a rich life. And she has touched the lives of many students at Indiana University. A recent PhD student expressed these thoughts about Maxine’s role as an advisor. “Maxine is widely regarded by her students, including myself, as an excellent adviser in several respects. She provides well thought out strategic advice, which is usually correct and she has allowed her students to not take that advice, which is usually a bad idea.”

We hope that Maxine will take our advice, which is to enjoy her retirement, and our thanks for her many contributions to Indiana University and to the field of Biology.

Keith Clay