

Volume 2, Issue 3

Autumn 1975, pp. 177-178

Professeur Jean-Georges Baer, 1902–75

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0376892900001326>

Published online by Cambridge University Press: 24 August 2009

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Abstract

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Owen: Lessons from a Caterpillar Plague in London's Berkeley Square

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and some direct evidence that plagues of plant-feeding insects are much more likely in pure stands of vegetation than in diverse communities. What might be called the community ecology of peasant cultivation is little understood, and there is an urgent need for research before more and more land is converted to monocultures.

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It is difficult—indeed scarcely possible—to think of any other loss which could be as devastating to our environmentalists' world as this one. However we attempt to define greatness—if we so dare—we are apt to think of Jean, and in various ways: yet his innate modesty was such that he appears to have been very little known to the general public. Nevertheless he had the unique combination of distinctions of having been a successful President of IUCN (1958–63), the first President of the International Biological Programme (1964–69) and subsequently President Emeritus, President of the Division of Zoology and Vice-President of the International Union of Biological Sciences, the President of WWF while it was being formed in 1961–62, and President of the World Federation of Parasitology (1970–74) and consequently of the Third International Congress of Parasitology—held last year in Munich, during which the accompanying photograph was taken. These high offices emphasize the very great esteem in which he was held by his scientific peers and colleagues. They also pay tribute to his qualities as a chairman and general counsellor, which were being superbly displayed *inter alia* as Chairman of the International Steering Committee of our International Conferences on Environmental Future and as an Advisory Editor of this Journal right up to the shock of his untimely death. Thus it was originally at his suggestion that we took the action described in the first-ever Editorial in this Journal, entitled 'Conservation to Aid Near East Settlement?', while he communicated to us immediately after his return from the Third International Congress of Parasitology the environmental resolutions of that Congress (see our Autumn issue of last year, p. 176), and the plan for the next International Conference on Environmental Future, entitled 'Growth Without Ecodisasters', it is much to be hoped can be executed in approximately the form that owes the greatest debt to his wisdom and firm guidance.

So much for international service. Nationally or more locally in Switzerland, Jean Baer was for many years *Professeur ordinaire* of Zoology and Director of the Institute of Zoology of the University of Neuchâtel, serving as *Recteur* of the University from 1949–51, and being named *Professeur honoraire* on his nominal retirement after passing the age of 70 in 1972. This freed him for many other duties, some of which have been indicated above. Meanwhile he had done his stint as Dean of the Faculty of Science and, for 12 years, on the Swiss National Foundation for Scientific Research. He had also served as President of the Scientific Commission of the Swiss National Parks. In these and other offices the deep scientific insight, direct

talk, and surety of judgement, which we had come to appreciate so widely in recent years, must have served him and his colleagues in good stead. A combination of human understanding not unmixed with intuition, clear reasoning, and administrative competence which found him always available to tackle problems, made him the ideal colleague—even as his ready wit and linguistic abilities made him a superb chairman on international occasions.

Jean-Georges Baer was born on 12 February 1902 in London, England, being educated at Westminster until his parents' return to Switzerland, where he attended the

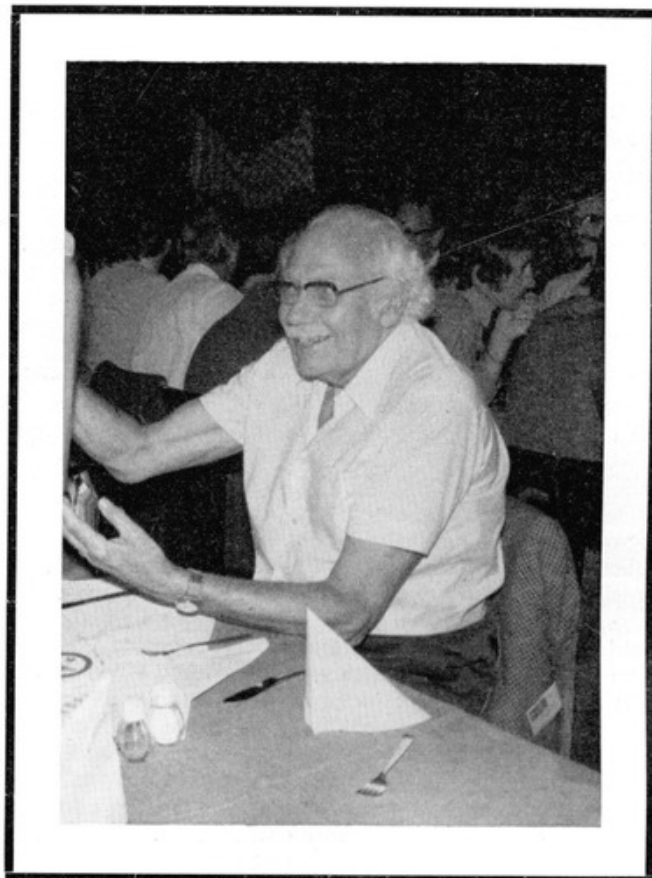


FIG. 1. President Jean Baer relaxing during the Third International Congress of Parasitology, Munich, West Germany, 25–31 August 1974.

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