

News and Comment

Dr. Warren Baxter Ballard, Jr. 1947–2012

Warren Ballard, wildlife researcher, editor, and professor died at his home at Lubbock, Texas, of pancreatic cancer 12 January 2012. He had a distinguished career in wildlife biology in Alaska, New Brunswick, Arizona, and most recently as Horn Professor in Texas Tech University's Department of Natural Resources. He supervised 44 MS and doctoral students and authored or co-authored over 200 research papers, as well as a dozen book chapters and monographs and over 30 proceedings and miscellaneous publications. Among other

editorial positions for several journals he was Associate Editor of *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* for mammals 1994-2001, 2007-2011, and before and during these periods contributed over 280 individual evaluation reviews of papers submitted to the journal. He was an effective proponent of involving graduate students in the review process as part of their scientific training. Warren is survived by his wife and frequent co-author, Heather A. Whitlaw. A detailed tribute is in preparation for a later issue of *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*.

On the Discovery of Eastern Leatherwood (*Dirca palustris*)

YASEEN MOTTIAR

Department of Cell & Systems Biology, University of Toronto, 25 Harbord Street, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 3G5, Canada; email: yaseen.mottiar@utoronto.ca

Mottiar, Yaseen. 2012. On the Discovery of Eastern Leatherwood (*Dirca palustris*). *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 126(1): 86–88.

The existing scientific literature dates the discovery of Eastern Leatherwood (*Dirca palustris* L.) to the 1730s and assigns John Clayton, a plant collector in the Virginia Colony, and Dutch botanist Jan Frederik Gronovius as the discoverers. But Michel Sarrazin, an early Canadian naturalist, was apparently the first to report on this species in 1700. Moreover, he also sent a living specimen of leatherwood to France. This case reminds us that the earliest information on some North American species predates the Linnaean binomial name.

La littérature scientifique courante attribue la découverte du bois de plomb (*Dirca palustris* L.) dans les années 1730 à John Clayton, un collectionneur de plantes dans la colonie de Virginie, et au botaniste hollandais Jan Frederik Gronovius. Cependant, le premier rapport sur cette espèce a été rédigé en 1700 par Michel Sarrazin, l'un des premiers naturalistes canadiens. En outre, il a envoyé un spécimen vivant de bois de plomb en France. Ce cas nous rappelle que les premières informations sur certaines espèces d'Amérique du Nord précèdent le nom binomial linnéen.

Key Words: botanical history, Eastern Leatherwood, *Dirca palustris*, Michel Sarrazin.

Eastern Leatherwood (*Dirca palustris* L.), also known as moosewood, wicopy, and *bois de plomb*, is an understory shrub found sporadically across most of eastern North America in rich, mesic soils. This species is well known by field-naturalists for its ephemeral spring flowers and extremely flexible stems. The genus contains three other species: Western Leatherwood (*D. occidentalis* Gray), Mexican Leatherwood (*D. mexicana* Nesom and Mayfield) and a recently identified species from the southern United States, *D. decipiens* Floden (Schrader and Graves 2004; Floden et al. 2009). But as with most North American flora, the eastern member of the genus was the first to be discovered by colonial botanists. Indeed, the botanical history of leatherwood is inherently linked to the history of colonization in North America.

In the scientific literature, a plant collector named John Clayton is credited with “discovering” this new

species in the 1730s when he sent dried specimens from the Virginia Colony to the Dutch botanist Jan Frederik Gronovius (Choquette 1925; Nevling 1968). Gronovius is then recognized as the first to report on leatherwood. In his *Flora Virginica*, he describes the plant as follows (Gronovius 1739):

“*Thymelaea* white flowers, which burst out at the beginning of spring: oblong, tapering leaves: twigs and bark very strong and flexible, hence the name Leather-wood. Grows by the banks of the Roanoke river, other rivers near hills, and in the county of Middlesex. Clayton add.” (translated from the original Latin)

Gronovius then apparently sent some of the specimens he had received from Clayton to Carl Linnaeus in Sweden. In his 1751 dissertation, a student of Linnaeus named Leonhard Johan Chenon was the first to