Obituary Professor Dr. WOLFGANG LANGNER

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On April 30th, 2005 the forestry profession in Germany lost the founder of this journal ***Silvae Genetica*** and one of its “fathers of forest genetics and tree improvement”.

WOLFGANG LANGNER was born in Chemnitz in Germany on September 26th, 1906. After a classical education at the humanistic grammar school in his native city he studied forest sciences at the universities in Freiburg, Munich and Tharandt. W. LANGNER's adviser during his university work in Tharandt, Saxony, was E. MÜNCH, professor of forest botany with a strong interest in genetics. W. LANGNER's doctoral dissertation was on the wood of Norway spruce. Before and with interruptions during the second world war he worked as person in charge for forest reproductive material in the forestry ministry in Berlin. After the war he got from the allies the mission to prepare the creation of research institutes for forest genetics and forest tree breeding in west and east Germany. In 1948 he established a research branch for tree breeding in Grosshansdorf-Schmalenbeck. Later the research facility in Grosshansdorf became the Institute for Forest Genetics and Forest Tree Breeding at the Federal Research Centre for Forestry and Forest Products (BFH) in Hamburg. Fifty-four years ago, in 1951, he founded this journal which initially was named “*Zeitschrift für Forstgenetik und Forstpflanzenzüchtung*”. Having enjoyed a classical education, he later gave the journal a Latin name. Although at that time the breeding of trees received primary interest, the name “*Silvae Genetica*” certainly anticipated future developments. This name has provided a welcome stimulus for the ever-growing proportion of publications on genetic topics and integration and application of genetic knowledge in breeding.

W. LANGNER's professional life has been successful. During his time as director of the Institute for Forest Genetics and Forest Tree Breeding, he led the institute in a somewhat unconventional way, which made it both rewarding and enjoyable to work there. He was able to rouse the interest of many people in the newly emerging field of forest genetics. A part of W. LANGNER's publications were devoted to problems in pathology and the genetics of pine and *Chamaecyparis*. Several times, W. LANGNER reported on achievements in the improvement of poplars, which long before the advent of non-conventional breeding were considered to be a group of model species. However, W. LANGNER probably published more on larch than on any other species. Having read about the Dunkeld hybrids, he concentrated on the artificial production of hybrids between European and Japanese larch and he successfully established

seed orchards for this purpose. He has always taken an interest in the development of the methodology of tree breeding. In the 30s and 40s, he advocated a low-intensity approach, which concentrated on the selection of single trees and stands and genetically appropriate measures for their thinning. The necessary precondition for the success of this approach is intensive forest management and silvicultural treatment of tree populations.

In 1957/1958, W. LANGNER outlined principles of forest tree breeding in a sequence of 16 papers in the journal *Allgemeine Forstzeitschrift*. In this non-technical introduction, which is of remarkable clarity, he further elaborated on the specific requirements of tree breeding in comparison with the breeding of agricultural crop plants. In many papers, W. LANGNER has dealt with the relationship between forest genetics and silviculture. This included ways of introducing breeding results into practical forestry. What has to be considered as more important nowadays is his interest in the genetic implications of silviculture.

The presentation of some of the highlights of W. LANGNER's activities would be incomplete without mentioning his concern with the legislation on forest reproductive material in the mid-50s. W. LANGNER was a pioneer in the field of forest genetics. However, he has not confined himself to just providing suitable research facilities for his colleagues, planting long-term field experiments, raising funds for students, and creating a well reputed international journal. He also contributed major publications such as the first report on dispersal distances of effective tree pollen. This was investigated using a morphological marker almost 20 years before biochemical-genetic markers were introduced into forest genetics research.

One can speculate whether it was modesty or the author's intention to reach a wide practical readership that moved him to publish a considerable part of his papers in non-technical journals, not to mention his predominant use of German.

Professor LANGNER was personally well known to all major actors of forest genetics in Germany and other countries who join us in paying tribute to an eminent scholar who will be warmly remembered for his wit and humanity and for the generosity with which he shared his immense learning with others.

HANS HATTEMER and BERND DEGEN

A list of his publications is available on request from the editorial office of this journal.