



## Obituary

### George William Argus

(14 April 1929–21 October 2022)

Published online 30 December 2022



George at his farmhouse home near Ottawa, Ontario, August 2006

The American botanist and one of the world's greatest salicologists, George Argus held positions at many universities and institutes in North America during his long and outstanding career, ultimately working as curator in the Canadian Museum of Nature, Ottawa from 1972. He published his first paper on willows as an MSc student in Wyoming in 1957. Countless more were to follow as well as publications on other aspects of botany and ecology. From 1985 he was a member of the editorial committee of *Flora of North America*, for which he wrote treatments of the genus *Salix* L. (Salicaceae), the latest being published in 2010. As a young man George developed a passion for living in Alaska and combined work

as a labourer on the Alaska Railroad and a lineman's assistant in the gold fields with the study of geology and botany. He completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Alaska in 1952 and then went on, via Wyoming, to complete his PhD at Harvard in 1961. Afterwards, he moved to Canada, teaching taxonomy and phytogeography at University of Saskatchewan for 8 years. Whilst there he studied the willows of Alaska and the Yukon and developed the DELTA database of *Salix* which evolved into the Interactive Identification of New World *Salix*: <http://aknhp.uaa.alaska.edu/botany/salix-salicaceae-identification-using-intkey/> and has been of considerable help to botanists in the taxonomic treatment of this genus. As the result of his work during this period, his book 'The Genus *Salix* in Alaska and the Yukon' was published in 1973.

While at Saskatchewan he collaborated with a visiting Japanese salicologist, Yutaka Suda, who was establishing a classification system for Japanese *Salix* which involved counting chromosome numbers. After a short spell at the University of Oregon, he soon returned to Canada to work for the Forestry Ecology Institute of the Canadian Forestry Service for two years. It was after that he and his wife and children moved to Ottawa where he spent the rest of his career, until his retirement in 1995.

At some point whilst living in Ottawa he achieved Canadian citizenship by reciting the names of all the provinces and territories of Canada. He was the Canadian botanist with CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) for 22 years and started and worked on the Rare and Endangered Plants Project, for which he was awarded the George Lawson Medal by the Canadian Botanical Association. He continued his studies on *Salix* including a field trip to Siberia where he met and collaborated with the other great salicologist of the time, Alexei K. Skvortsov.

An article dedicated to George Argus at the time of his 85th birthday and paying tribute to his many accomplishments was published in *Skvortsovia* (2014, 1(2): 99–111) and his *Bibliography of Salix L. (Salicaceae)* which was published in *Skvortsovia* (2020, 7(1): 1–64) contains details of all his publications up to the very recent years. There are twenty-four scientific names published by George Argus and a willow that was named after him, *Salix × argusii* B.Boivin.

George leaves his wife of 66 years, Mary, and 5 children, 3 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren to all of whom his colleagues and friends express their sincere condolences. George was an extremely modest but globally respected and knowledgeable botanist who specialised in *Salix*. He was one to follow, a ray of light in the dark realm of willows.

Compiled by Irina V. Belyaeva and Keith Chamberlain