OBITUARY: TET (TREVOR) TROUGHT (1922-2011)

‘Trevoring’ or ‘pootling around’ were phrases coined to describe the unique blend of ingenuity, observation and pottering that was the hallmark of entomologist Trevor Trought at work and at home over many decades. While it was a love of trout fishing that brought Trevor and his family to New Zealand in 1966, the agricultural research community will remember him for his fascination for anything with six legs and his ability to observe, improvise and draw inferences. He was a great and enthusiastic mentor, being generous with his time and sometimes very funny.

His early years in entomology were as a government scientist in Uganda (1951-54), and with Shell Chemicals in the UK (1954-66). It was his knowledge of agrichemicals and indeed, something that seemed to approach affection for them, that brought him as a government recruit to the New Zealand Ministry of Agriculture of Fisheries in Wellington. There he was involved in assessing chemicals for local registration.

In 1968 Trevor moved with his family to Christchurch and the Lincoln MAF campus, to focus directly on the control of agricultural pests. While he pootled on a wide range of pests, he had particular interest in the Argentine stem weevil and grass grub. As an astute applied scientist he observed that some grass grub larvae stopped feeding for no apparent reason. His discovery led, with others, to the identification of a disease that two decades later resulted in the commercial development of a biological control agent for the pest.

He retired from the Ministry of Agriculture in 1982 after truly inspiring the next generation of entomologists with his well-targeted irreverence, curiosity and ingenuity. He thereafter joined Coated Seeds before moving to the Marlborough Sounds to take up the challenge of sorting out the wasp problem.

Trevor’s origins remained completely opaque to most of his colleagues. In fact he was born in Cairo in 1922 to British parents. His father, a botanist, was in the Colonial Service. His family moved to India and at the age of nine, he was sent ‘back’ to the UK to school. Here he boarded at the Dragon Preparatory School and then Marlborough School, both near Oxford. It was during this time he developed his enduring love of fishing.

On leaving school, Trevor joined the RAF as a pilot and after graduating near the top of his class was posted to the RAF base in Saskatchewan, Canada, where he trained pilots for much of the war. Near the end of the conflict he returned to the UK and was about to start flying bombers into Europe when the war ended. Rumour at the time had it that Hitler packed it in when he had heard that Trevor was in his way. In 1951, he graduated from Cambridge University with a BA in agricultural science.

Tribute contributed by Stephen Goldson and Katherine Trought