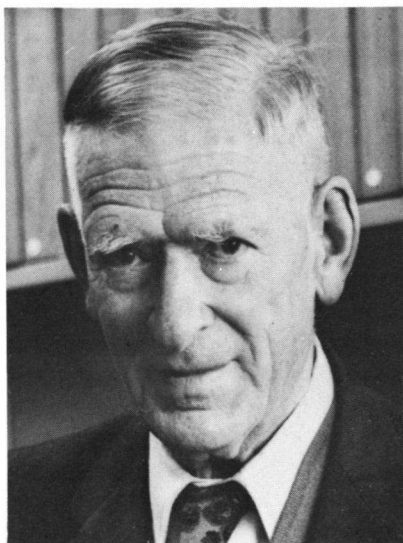


OBITUARY

J. S. ARMSTRONG

A short biography of JOHN S. ARMSTRONG (born: June 9, 1892, North Allerton, Yorkshire, England; died: Feb. 7, 1977, Taupo, New Zealand; surgeon, general medical practitioner and well-known entomologist) is followed by a list of his odonatological publications (1958-1978), all of which are devoted to the New Zealand fauna.

During his long, varied and productive life J.S. ARMSTRONG had witnessed great changes, particularly in the natural communities of plants and animals for which he had such a close affection. The rapidity and extent of these changes must have been further accentuated for him because he himself was the custodian of a family tradition in natural history (a collection of insects he bequeathed to the War Memorial Museum in Auckland before his death had been assembled by four generations of his family, beginning in 1810). He was a man of wide ability, and for many years played an active and leading role in community affairs in Taupo. He saw, and helped to guide, great changes



there also during a period when the town's population increased more than an hundredfold. In his approach to scientific and human problems John Armstrong was very much an interdisciplinary man; accordingly this account will lack balance in so far as it must necessarily be confined to activities related to his contributions to our knowledge of Odonata.

After graduating M.B. and Ch.B. at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland in 1914 he was posted, as a Captain in the Royal Army Medical Corps, to India in

1915. There, initially at Lucknow, he began actively to collect butterflies and birds. His interest in dragonflies, which later became his principal one, dated from an encounter with F.C. FRASER in 1916, on the hospital ship *Madras* bound for Mesopotamia. Fraser asked Armstrong to send him Odonata from Mesopotamia; as it happened, Armstrong found it difficult to do so because (as he once wistfully remarked) dragonflies and hospital patients shared the same pattern of seasonal abundance!

Armstrong returned to England in 1919, took the Diploma in Tropical Medicine at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in 1920, and then went to Samoa as a pathologist, arriving there (via Auckland, New Zealand) in 1921. In Samoa, where he was put in charge of Apia Hospital, his many activities as a naturalist included assembling material for his subsequent book on Samoan birds, and collecting Odonata for Fraser.

From 1925 until his death, with only brief periods away, Armstrong lived in Taupo, where he was in general practice until 1950, and where he acquired an intimate knowledge of insects and particularly Odonata. During the early part of this period he came to know the most active New Zealand entomologists, including G.V. HUDSON and R.J. TILLYARD, and to collaborate with some of the better known fly fishermen, attracted to Taupo by the superlative trout fishing that was to be had there, and with whom Armstrong shared an interest in the fishes' diet!

In 1950 Armstrong returned to Samoa for three years, as Medical Officer of Health, and while there he corresponded actively with F.C. Fraser, again sending him the Odonata he collected. When in England in 1956, Armstrong stayed in Burley, in the New Forest, and from there he visited, and collected with, Fraser; and he went to see A.E. GARDNER at his home in Banstead, Surrey, in order to learn about techniques for rearing Odonata – a field in which Gardner was having conspicuous success. It was in respect of his interest in dragonfly life-histories that Armstrong and I first corresponded, in 1958.

John Armstrong published five papers on Odonata – all on species in New Zealand or on outlying islands. One paper (1958b) reflects his interest in their breeding habits, and the rest in their colonisation and pattern of dispersal. His most substantial paper (1958b) provides a means for identifying the three species of *Corduliidae* found in the Taupo district, and it reports on features of their breeding behaviour, egg development and habitat preference. His other papers are concerned with the arrival and subsequent spread in New Zealand of certain species. He made good use of the opportunities available to an acute observer living in the Central Plateau region of the North Island over a period of 50 years during which terrestrial and aquatic habitats underwent great changes: his last paper (1978), which documents the arrival in this region and subsequent spread of *Hemicordulia australiae*, illustrates this well.

Armstrong's knowledge of the New Zealand Odonata was far more extensive than his publications indicate. Fortunately he readily shared this wide knowledge with those who sought it; and his lucid, precise and entertaining way of relating his observations made such conversations enjoyable as well as informative. In February 1975 he allowed me to record on tape his answers to a wide-ranging set of questions about the taxonomy, ecology and behaviour of New Zealand dragonflies; the transcribed version of these conversations (1975) constitutes invaluable resource material for anyone wishing to undertake research in this field. The following year, in May, a recording was likewise made of his comments on his insect collection that has been given to the Entomology Division of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research in Auckland. The photograph, for which I thank CATHERINE ARMSTRONG and the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, was taken on that occasion.

John Armstrong's principal contribution to odonatology lay in the collections he made — mainly in Samoa and New Zealand; in his publications; in the help and encouragement he gave to those who sought it; and in the perceptive way in which he interpreted changes in faunal composition and related these to progressive modifications of habitats by man. By those who knew him personally, he will be remembered with affection and respect: for his engaging sense of humour and gracious manner, and for a personality of great charm.

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