

In Memoriam - Jeffrey Alexander Hutchings

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In Memoriam - Jeffrey Alexander Hutchings

Jeff was born on September 11, 1958 in Orillia, Ontario to Wendy and Alexander Hutchings. He was the eldest of five children followed by Stephen, Roslyn (who pre-deceased him in 1982), Julia and Jamie. Jeff's deep and abiding love for his family in Orillia was eclipsed solely by his love for his daughter – the brightest light of his life - Lex Hutchings. He also leaves behind his partner, Anna Kuparinen, and his very dear friend of nearly forty years, Joyce Yates.

As a faculty member in the Department of Biology at Dalhousie University, Jeff (PhD, FRSC) was a highly regarded, enthusiastic teacher, and generations of students gained an appreciation of the marvelous diversity of fishes in his extremely popular undergraduate course on that topic. He was one of the Biology Department's most famous scientists and a staunch supporter of providing evidence-based, objective advice to government and industry. After starting at Dalhousie in 1995, he continued earlier work that began during a visiting postdoctoral fellow at DFO on the causes of the collapse of Northern cod, and later expanded his applied research to understanding potential barriers to population recovery. All the while, he remained true to his academic roots, and was dedicated to addressing fundamental questions related to the evolution of life histories.

Jeff always considered Orillia to be his true home. While he had not resided there for many decades, Orillia resonated in his heart nearly every day. To his mind, his induction into the Orillia Hall of Fame was one of his greatest achievements and his joining therein two of his greatest heroes, Stephen Leacock and Gordon Lightfoot, was a great honour and a source of immense pride. His deep connection to his hometown, to the Muskoka area, and to the values of kindness and understanding which were instilled in him by his parents and their broader community, was later exemplified by his compassion for others and his desire to help those who needed it – be they family, students, colleagues, friends or strangers – and he did so in any and every way he could.

A voracious and wide reader, Jeff's passion for science, history, politics and fiction constantly saw him scouring contemporary and antiquarian bookstores for rare gems. He did this with such fervour that he was well known to more than one bookshop owner. His favourite presents to give others were books: they were used as payment for minding a very young Lex, or as an acknowledgment of accomplishment for graduate students upon successful completion of their theses. Reading, in Jeff's words, is "a gift that few successfully receive and one that even fewer can successfully give." And throughout his storied career, he certainly gave the world many opportunities to read. His carefully and elegantly crafted writing, be it in scientific articles, in reports or in books, inspired – and will continue to inspire – countless scientists, policy-makers and anyone who reads his works.

Notwithstanding a gift for words, Jeff claimed he never listened to song lyrics (that is, unless those lyrics were written by Leonard Cohen or Gordon Lightfoot). Jeff's love of music spanned well beyond that of an educated listener. He was both a decent trumpet player and a pianist, and the latter was put to good use when he took part in a variety of performances during his undergraduate years at the University of Toronto. Jeff counted these as years very well spent, and he considered his mediocre grades at the time to be a testament to the fun and camaraderie he experienced with friends and acquaintances.

Following his years spent in the hometown of his beloved Maple Leafs, and after tree planting in

British Columbia and employment with Ed Crossman in the wilds of Ontario, Jeff undertook graduate work at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). His great love for the province stemmed from his father growing up in Sunnyside, Trinity Bay, and Jeff regularly honed his idioms and accent during visits with extended family. From a field research perspective, Jeff's work on freshwater species took him to some of the island's most remote and beautiful landscapes. While he largely enjoyed being alone in the field, memories of riverside chats with his assistants and colleagues played a pivotal role in his graduate experience. Post- doctoral work at the University of Edinburgh advanced his studies further.

Jeff's graduate and postdoctoral research was facilitated by the hugely supportive and wide influences of Dick Haedrich, Doug Morris, John Gibson, Linda Partridge, Felicity Huntingford and Ransom Myers.

Jeff became an accomplished, and world-renowned expert in life history theory, a feat that would culminate in one of his most hard-earned and fulfilling achievements – an undergraduate textbook on the topic published in late 2021. "A Primer of Life Histories" was largely written in spaces Jeff loved: first in Iceland, and then in central Finland, where he recently lived with Anna. It was there that Jeff found solace and a means to clear his head through daily outings to walk or ski, go birding and fishing, or to swim, row or scuba dive.

Many know Jeff for his brilliantly inquisitive mind and his myriad academic achievements: he was the Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Chair in Fish, Fisheries, and Oceans at Dalhousie University, Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, former Chair of the Committee on Endangered Species and Wildlife in Canada, Fellow of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, past President of the Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution as well as winner of the Huntsman Medal for international research excellence and outstanding contributions to marine sciences. He was author of over 250 scientific papers, a collaborator with a diverse field of scientists and policy makers, an editor of numerous scientific journals and a mentor to a dizzying number of undergraduate, graduate students and post-doctoral researchers.

For those who interacted with him regularly on a professional basis, Jeff is remembered as having an uncanny ability to remember names, a keen wit, a tireless interest in the scientific endeavours of others, and an unparalleled drive to effect change in policy that he thought inadequate. For his family and his few close friends, Jeff will forever be remembered as everything else: a loving father, a loyal son and brother, and a man who could carry a conversation, carry a tune, tell a great joke, delight and enjoy, and laugh heartily.

Jeff's compassion is best expressed by one of his hometown heroes: "...the house you live in will never fall down, if you pity the stranger who stands at your door". To honour this, please donate in his name to United Way or Nature Conservancy of Canada, or a charity of your choice.

A celebration of life will occur in spring 2022 when restrictions ease and Jeff can be commemorated appropriately.

Further reflections on Jeff's life and career:

<https://www.echovita.com/ca/obituaries/on/orillia/jeffrey-hutchings-14156003>

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/climate-and-environment/jeffrey-hutchings-advocate-for-independent-fisheries-science-dies-at-age-63-1.5762924>

<https://globalnews.ca/news/8589714/dalhousie-biology-prof-death-jeffrey-hutchings/>

<https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/childhood-friends-remember-jeff-hutchings-as-man-of-strong-integrity-5029168>

