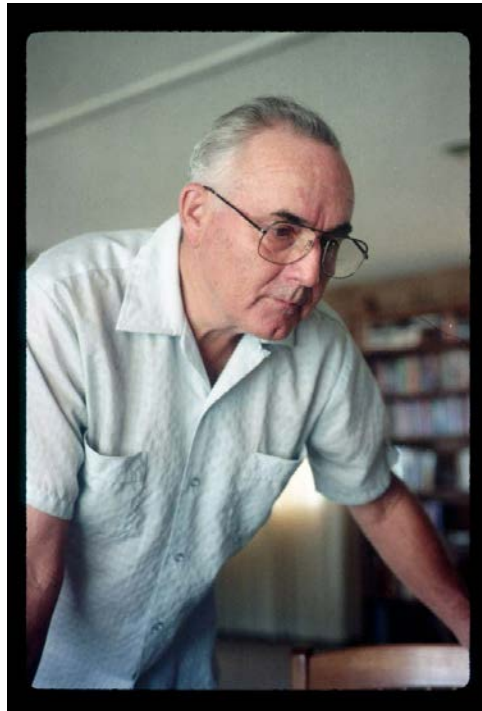


## **In Memoriam**

**Wilbur (Bill) Waldo Mayhew**  
**Professor of Biology Emeritus**  
**UC Riverside**  
**1920 – 2014**



Emeritus professor Wilbur (Bill) Waldo Mayhew died on September 19, 2014 at age 94. He was followed in death by his wife Corinne in 2019 and is survived by three children – Bruce, Betty, and Bill. One of the ten founding faculty of the University of California, Riverside’s Biology Department, Bill was hired in 1954 and retired in 1989.

Although Bill was born in Yoder, Colorado on March 17, 1920, he considered himself a California native because his family moved first to Stockton when he was a year old. In this rural setting, Bill developed a love of animals and nature that his friends called him “Bugs”.

In 1940 Bill obtained an A. A. degree in science from Modesto Junior College and, wanting a break from school, joined the U. S. Army Air Corps (now the Air Force) to put aside money for further education. He was assigned to the 88<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Squadron of the 7<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group and served as a ball-turret gunner on B-17s and B-24s during World War II and was involved in missions throughout Asia and North Africa until his plane was shot down over

Sicily and crashed on Malta in 1943. Spared further combat duty because of his wounds, he served as a gunnery instructor “back here in the States” until the end of the war in 1945. Dr. Mayhew was honored for his service during the war with a Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal, Purple Heart, and Presidential Unit Citation with two oak leaf clusters. He formed close friendships with other members of his squadron and was the photo editor for books recounting the history of the 7th Bombardment Group from 1918 to 1995 (Mayhew 1998; Dorr 1996).

While a gunnery instructor, Bill discovered to his surprise that he enjoyed teaching and found it a worthy endeavor—“We were helping to protect the lives of those young fellows”. With his newly found passion for teaching, he decided to continue his education after the war. With GI Bill support, he studied zoology at the University of California, Berkeley, receiving an A.B. in 1948, an M.A. in 1951, and a Ph.D. in 1953 under the tutelage of A. Starker Leopold, son of conservationist Aldo Leopold and himself an eminent advocate for wildlife conservation in California. With that pedigree, it is no surprise that Bill later became a tireless force for the protection of natural lands as outdoor laboratories for research and teaching.

“Jobs were extremely rare” when Bill graduated from Berkeley in 1953 and he’d “look in the want ads for a shoe salesman and all sorts of things to see if I could get a job.” He heard “through the grapevine” that Riverside was soon going to host a new campus and submitted an application. While waiting to hear, he worked in the UCLA Department of Nuclear Medicine and Radiation Biology on projects that investigated the effects of Strontium-90 on living tissue and periodically visited Riverside to check on the status of his application. He said that when he got the call offering him a position at Riverside he was “so glad ... I left the ground about that far [gesturing]” because “that radiation biology was not my cup of tea”.

Bill was initially hired as an instructor to teach parasitology (the positions of the founding faculty became tenure-track later on), but in those days Riverside was essentially a small liberal arts school that focused on teaching —“the Swarthmore of the UC system”— and faculty wore many hats. Bill taught a variety of subjects in vertebrate biology, but was best known for his field classes, which some students credit with completely changing the course of their lives. With weekly overnight field trips that logged a thousand miles a semester on university vehicles, he introduced thousands of students not only to the habitats of Southern California and how resident animals managed to thrive there, but to the joys of field work and camping misadventures. “The [difficult] field trips... were the ones you would hear the students ... bragging to their friends about.... [They] seemed to really enjoy that kind of life. ... I had waiting lists at times”.

The field classes reflected Bill’s research interests in ecophysiology and natural history. His doctoral work explored the relationship between precipitation and nesting success of ducks, and he went on to explore seasonal patterns of migration

and reproduction in Cliff Swallows, and effects of environmental conditions on reproduction and growth of a variety of desert lizards and amphibians.

Bill soon grew concerned about the disappearance of wild lands during the post-war California growth spurt. “On these field trips,” he said, “I would go out to various locations [with] the students. The next year I would go out and a house or a subdivision had been built there.” UCLA professors Mildred Mathias and Ken Norris had the same experience and concern, and together the three decided, “We had to have some places where we would be able to go back time and time again.” Bill jumped whenever opportunities to protect land for research and teaching offered themselves. In 1958 he encouraged Philip Boyd to donate two and a half sections of land for what became the Boyd Deep Canyon Reserve (and had to argue to skeptical laboratory-oriented UCR faculty that it was worth accepting!), and in 1963 he obtained 160 acres of land from the Bureau of Land Management in the Box Springs Mountains (where the big “C” above UCR is located).

In 1963, after seven parcels had been given to UC (including the two that Bill Mayhew had secured), Ken Norris went to University of California President Clark Kerr to request that a system of natural reserves be established. Kerr was favorably inclined and established a committee with representatives from each campus – Bill was Riverside’s representative – to draw up a specific plan, which the Regents approved in 1965. By that time Bill had decided that he “could do biology much more good by going out and saving land for other people” than to publish “two or three more papers. ... So, when I finally got my [associate] professorship [with tenure] in 1969, from then on is when I really *went after land*.”

And that he did. Bill served as director of the UCR-administered reserves from 1969 to 1990, and was indefatigable in searching out properties, evaluating them, and cultivating prospective donors. Through his efforts Riverside, the smallest of the UC campuses, administered more reserves than any other campus when he retired. Bill was sometimes accused of “wanting to [be able to] walk on university land from the Mexican border to the Oregon border.” But the land evaluation process was logical enough: “What we were trying to do was get a representative of every habitat that occurs in California so that the students and faculty would be able to work with any of the habitats that are in the state.”

Not only did Bill work to acquire lands, he also logged in countless “sweat equity” hours to maintain them; traveled to Berkeley to “rattle the cages” of administrators to shake loose operating funds and staff salaries; tirelessly took new faculty and other visitors on field trips to promote research and class use of reserves; and, together with his wife Corinne, endowed a fund to support graduate research at Boyd Deep Canyon Reserve.

Why was Bill Mayhew so successful? In the words of his comrade-in-arms Ken Norris, “What Bill does is so simple. He radiates a transparent honesty that draws

everyone into his plans. He is such a simple guy himself that there is no one he can't talk to, one on one, with no suspicion to sweep away." Perhaps because of his wartime experiences working in a team, his homespun manner, and his infectious optimism and humor, Bill had a knack for getting diverse interests to find common ground and come together to find solutions to conservation problems.

Bill received several honors in recognition of his contributions to land conservation. In 1983 he was the first recipient of the Aldo Starker Leopold Conservation award from the California chapter of The Nature Conservancy. He received the George B. Fell Award from the Natural Areas Association in 2003. In 2014 an anonymous donor endowed the Wilbur W. Mayhew Chair in Geo-Ecology to lead UCR's EDGE Institute in research to find solutions to pressing environmental challenges. Dr. Marilyn Fogel became the first Mayhew Chair in 2017.

But these awards do not do justice to Bill Mayhew's legacy. The state of California, the University of California, and the field sciences owe him an enormous debt of gratitude for persisting, as he often advised others to do in one of his "Mayhewisms": "If you can't make it in one jump, jump twice". Those of us who had the privilege of accompanying him in the field and sharing his vision can only say, "Thank you, 'Bugs' (aka 'Uncle Dudley', 'Wild Bill', 'Wild Willy Wahoo, or 'Willy Mildew') —You shot him out of the saddle!"

Prepared by EEOB faculty David Reznick and Kimberly Hammond, and emeritus faculty Mary V. Price and Nickolas M. Waser with quotes from Dorr (1996) and Mayhew (1998) Pictorial History. Edited by Paul Nabity.

### Links

Transcription of Oral History Interview with Wilbur M. Mayhew:

<https://ucrhistory.ucr.edu/mayhew.htm>

[https://edge.ucr.edu/documents/wilbur\\_chair\\_docs/mayhew.pdf](https://edge.ucr.edu/documents/wilbur_chair_docs/mayhew.pdf)

Tribute to Professor Mayhew in *Transect* magazine:

[https://edge.ucr.edu/documents/wilbur\\_chair\\_docs/Transect%20Spring%202001\\_Vol%2019\\_No1.pdf](https://edge.ucr.edu/documents/wilbur_chair_docs/Transect%20Spring%202001_Vol%2019_No1.pdf)