



Dan Ward (with his trusty companion, Zair)

Dan Ward

Professor of Botany (retired), University of Florida

Interview by T. Ann Williams, Paynes Prairie Chapter

There was no hesitation when Dan Ward answered my question as to when he first developed an interest in plants. “When I was still in diapers,” he replied, with a twinkle in his eyes and just a hint of a grin. “When I was about seven, I wrote my father a letter detailing an experiment I did on the rate of seed germination for

several different crop plants while staying at my aunt's farm one summer." Continuing his chronological interest in plants, he mentions that his next major event occurred at age 12. A neighbor showed him the stump of a tree and pointed out to the budding young taxonomist how one could determine a tree's age by counting the growth rings. At age 15, he measured and recorded, in a notebook he still has, the circumferences of all the big trees he could find in Montgomery County, Indiana.

Daniel Bertram Ward was born on March 20, 1928, in Crawfordsville, Indiana. His roots in Indiana have a long history as both sets of his grandparents were pioneer settlers of the state, having migrated there from Kentucky in the 1830s. His father was in the dairy manufacturing business which involved purchasing raw milk from local dairy farmers, then turning that milk into marketable products such as bottled milk, butter, or ice cream. As a young boy growing up during the depression years, Dan's family was considered fairly well-off for that period in our country's history.

Dan's early interest in botany was encouraged by several other adults in his formative years. Each week his Sunday School teacher, a botany professor at Wabash College, would give him a plant specimen (a leaf, nut, fruit, twig, etc.) to identify by the following Sunday. With the aid of Alphonso Wood's 1864 *Eastern U. S. Flora* and an early edition of Britton and Brown, Dan was able to identify most of his weekly plant specimens. Alphonso Wood's book preceded the famous Asa Gray flora series and was a gift from a family friend. He obtained his copy of Britton and Brown at a Wabash College library book sale for the then princely sum of a dime.

Upon completion of high school, Dan attended Wabash College where he received a Bachelors Degree. He then attended Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, and earned his Masters Degree. From 1952 to 1954, his college career was interrupted by military duty when he served in the Army Chemical Corps. In 1956, he married Suzanne Siegfried, the daughter of a Cornell University engineering professor. He completed his college career in 1958, when he graduated with a Ph.D. in Plant Taxonomy. With his newly awarded degree in hand, Dan and Sue headed south to Gainesville, Florida, and the University of Florida to begin his position as Assistant Botanist at the Agricultural Experiment Station. At Rolf's Hall, he found a sizable herbarium with scotch-tape mounted specimens stored in wood cabinets. Over the next twenty years, Dan expanded the col-

lection to become one of the largest in the southeastern United States (tying with North Carolina University's collection).

In the early 1970s, Dan was a founder of the Florida Committee on Rare and Endangered Plants and Animals (FCREPA) and was elected chairperson of the botany section. He and other botanists, Ralph Brown, Dennis Hardin, and Sue Cooper, compiled an initial list of native plants in need of protection and created a preliminary draft of a bill, now FS 581.185, for the Florida Department of Agriculture. When the bill was presented, Dan gave supporting testimony to the legislative committees. Upon passage of the bill, Doyle Conner, then Commissioner of Agriculture, appointed Dan to the Advisory Council provided for in the bill. Conner's successor, Bob Crawford, reappointed Dan to the Advisory Council on which he has served to the present. Over the next seven years, FCREPA published a series of books on Florida's rare and endangered animal species. In 1979, Dan completed and published Volume 5 of the series entitled, *Endangered Biota of Florida (Plants)*, which has been the standard reference for the state's endangered plant species, many of which were incorporated into the Federal Endangered Species Act.

After 37 years in the University of Florida's Department of Botany, Dan officially retired in 1995 from teaching, but not from his "unofficial" career of compiling information on Florida plants. In 1990, he and friend, Bobby Ing, volunteered themselves to update and expand the Florida Division of Forestry's early listings of the state's champion trees. Over the next five years they traveled the state extensively, locating and remeasuring nearly all the old trees of record and adding several hundred new records. Their work culminated in the book sponsored by FNPS, *Big Trees: The Florida Record*.

Dan is the proud father of four children and grandfather of four. His oldest son Forrest, father of Dan's two grandsons, lives in Virginia where he has a heating and air conditioning business in addition to being a commercial pilot. Middle son, Gordon, lives in Athens, Georgia, and is a graduate student of Environmental Science at the University of Georgia. Dan's third son, Douglas, the father of his two granddaughters, lives in Juneau, Alaska, and owns and operates a successful whale watching business with a fleet of five enclosed jet boats which take visitors out for a close-encounter feeding humpback and orca whales. His daughter, Sylvia, also a resident of Alaska, until recently was the Director of an Environmental Center in

Fairbanks. In June 2000, Dan will fly to Alaska to attend her wedding.

Since his official retirement, Dan has remained a resident of Gainesville. He still resides in close proximity to the University of Florida with Zair, his best friend and closest companion, an African Basenji, who accompanies Dan on most of his plant hunting expeditions.

