

*"The observer of insects has, indeed, proposed remedies which the agriculturist cannot adopt; and the agriculturist, on the other hand, ignorant of the nature of insects, has pursued the very plan which has been the most congenial to the habits of the insects which he wished to destroy...."*

J.O. Westwood (1938, *The Entomologist's Textbook*), cited by van der Vecht (1953f).

## Obituary and bibliography of Jacobus van der Vecht (1906-1992)

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Achterberg, C. van. Obituary and bibliography of Jacobus van der Vecht (1906-1992).

Zool. Med. Leiden 66 (16), 31.xii.1992: 295-302, 1 photograph.— ISSN 0024-0672.

Key words: van der Vecht; obituary; bibliography; Hymenoptera; Aculeata; Vespidae; Sphecidae; Apidae; Pompilidae; Trigonalyidae.

An obituary and the bibliography of Jacobus van der Vecht (5.vii.1919-15.iii.1992) is given.

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### Obituary

Prof. Dr Jacobus van der Vecht died 15 March, 1992 at his home in Putten (a village in central Netherlands) after a long and difficult period of illness. He was born on 5 July, 1906 in The Hague, where his father held a position as Master of the wine-cellars of Her Majesty ("keldermeester") at the court of the Queenmother Emma. His father was interested in natural history, and reared e.g. butterflies. He liked to walk with his boys to watch nature. This interest developed into a passion for biology in only one of his children.

After school van der Vecht met his later colleague at the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie, H.C. Blöte, in the field, who was already much interested in entomology. He obtained excellent results at the secondary school (HBS) in The Hague. He ended up with two grants, so he could afford the luxury to choose between a municipal and a governmental grant. He decided to study biology at the Rijksuniversiteit (State University) at Leiden. As a student he started with the Aculeate Hymenoptera: general faunistics, and taxonomy of bees (especially the genus *Andrena*, a large and often difficult to classify genus in Europe) and Sphecidae. After obtaining his Master degree from Leiden University in 1928 he went to the former Dutch East Indies to work as a zoologist at the Instituut voor Plantenziekten at Buitenzorg (= Institute for Plant Diseases and Pests at Bogor). When he arrived in Java he tried to continue his work on Hymenoptera in his spare time, despite other interests. He told me (with the benefit of hindsight) some years ago that playing less tennis and collecting more Hymenoptera would have been better. Once a ball hit him badly, which cost him most of the function of one eye. His work on Indo-Australian Hymenoptera resulted in publications on Trigonalyidae (1934c), and on Vespidae (*Provespa* and *Labus* (1935a+c)), later followed by papers on Sphecidae (1937a+b), Apidae (1938c, 1941b), Sapygidae (1940c), and Pompilidae (1949d).

Professionally he studied economically important species of animals, which in

fact meant in most cases the study of pests and their parasites. The study of fluctuations in populations of pests was an important field of research. One of the first results was his thesis on a bug noxious on pepper plants, *Dasynus piperis* China, for which he was awarded a Ph.D. from Leiden University in 1933. He reared 40 successive generations of the coconut leafmoth, *Artona catoxantha* (Hamps.), to study its population dynamics, its habits and the effect of parasites and hyperparasites. A publication on the subject was intended to be published in 1941, but the proofs and illustrations were lost during the war. Fortunately, one copy turned up later, and after new illustrations have been made, it was finally published in 1950. In the mean time he became interested in the influence of climate on pests (1936b), and published an important paper with F.H. Schmidt on the east monsoon fluctuations in Java and Madura (1952a). After the war he studied the notorious mentek disease of rice in Java.

A main line in his later research was his interest in the biogeography of the Indo-Malaysian area. He started with a paper on *Xylocopa* species of Celebes (1953c), which is still important for an understanding of the variation of the carpenter-bees of Sulawesi. Also important is his treatise on the evolution of some Indo-Australian *Eumenes* species (Vespidae; 1959e, 1961c). He found a distinctive difference between the (more uniform) colour pattern of Vespidae on the large islands of the area and a (strong) variation of the pattern of the same species on small marginal islands of the archipelago. He became interested in the nest structure of Vespidae and its evolutionary consequences. He discovered what is now known as "van der Vecht's organ", an organ producing an anti-ant secretion used by some groups of Vespidae to protect their nests against ants.

During the Japanese occupation of Indonesia he was kept in prison camps separated from his wife and in harsh circumstances. He was transported to Burma to work on the notorious Burma railway. Even 40 years later he told me that sometimes he still imagined feeling the blows with sticks on his back by the Japanese military. After the liberation he stayed for a while in Singapore (Raffles Museum) before he could return to Java to be reunited with his wife, who survived the 3½ years in the Japanese prison camps. Dr M.A. Lieftinck, who was still allowed to work at the Museum Bogoriense during the first year of the occupation, had stored van der Vecht's collection and library in the museum. Fortunately, owing to Lieftinck's action, both survived in good condition; otherwise they would have been lost, because van der Vecht's house was looted in 1945. In January 1946 he arrived in The Netherlands to recover and in the same year he could spend three months in the U.S.A, first of all to study the latest developments of agricultural entomology (called, peculiarly enough, "economic entomology"! ). He met Schwarz, Timberlake, Linsley, Michener and Pate, but he missed Cockerell. From 1947-1951 he was head of the Institute for Plant Diseases and Pests at Bogor and cared for the important collection of insects. This collection served as a base for Kalshoven's book on agricultural entomology of Indonesia. In 1951 he was again in The Netherlands but in 1952 he returned as professor of entomology and nematology in the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Indonesia at Bogor. After Dr. P.A. van der Laan ceased to teach entomology in Bogor (and continued as lecturer at the University at Amsterdam in 1951), van der Vecht directed most of his attention to entomology. At the same time together with Lieftinck he tried to keep the Entomological Society of Indonesia going; a difficult job because only a few full time entomologists remained in Indonesia after the independence.



J. van der Vecht (1906-1992).

In 1955 working in Indonesia became problematic and once more he returned, and this time permanently to The Netherlands, where he was appointed curator of Hymenoptera at the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie in Leiden. In 1962 he was appointed professor "extraordinaris" for zoological taxonomy at the State University at Groningen, followed in 1964 by a full professorship at the State University at Leiden, so that he had to resign from the museum. In 1963 he was chosen a member of the Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen (= Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences), but after five years he had to retire because of health reasons. After his final return to The Netherlands he has played an important rôle in the study of Hymenoptera (especially Vespidae and Sphecidae, preparing catalogues and revisions) and

in teaching taxonomy. Van der Vecht revived (together with Ch. Ferrière) the pre-war Hymenopterorum Catalogus, which is still continuing. He recognized at an early stage the importance of phylogenetics for taxonomy and he advocated integration of new insights in the evolutionary processes in the synthetic evolution theory. He served the Netherlands Entomological Society as president between 1961-1968. He made (often with his wife, Elizabeth M. (Bep) Bourguignon, who actively helped him with collecting) several trips (e.g., to Surinam, Papua New Guinea and Argentina) to collect Hymenoptera and to meet friends and colleagues in the field of Aculeate Hymenoptera.

He was a gifted scientist, who planned to do a lot more than he could accomplish in his life time. This was at least partly because of the harsh years during the war. He was an ardent collector of Aculeate Hymenoptera (and during his retirement also parasitic Hymenoptera in Putten and surroundings) and spent a lot of energy improving the Hymenoptera collection at the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie at Leiden. His years in retirement were clouded by the mental illness of his wife Bep and later also of himself. In the first years of his illness he was well aware of the deterioration of his memory and he often felt lonely after his wife became severely ill and subsequently died in 1986. They regretted very much the absence of children; their only child died as a baby before the war, and after the period in the Japanese prison camps, no children were born. He was a real gentleman and always willing to help solving questions, notably concerning Aculeate Hymenoptera. He will be remembered as one of the great ones in Hymenoptera.









