

## Bruce Dancik: He's Hooked!

If you read *Science Editor* regularly or have attended CSE annual meetings, you may well know who Bruce Dancik is. If you are interested in the population genetics of woody plant species, it's very likely that you recognize his name. Dancik is a professor in the Department of Renewable Resources and director of the Devonian Botanic Garden at the University of Alberta (in Canada). Since 1990, he has been editor-in-chief of the NRC [National Research Council Canada] Research Press. Past positions include associate vice-president (academic) at the University of Alberta and editor of the *Canadian Journal of Forest Research*. In 1992-1993, Dancik was president of CSE. He also has chaired and served on numerous CSE committees.

Dancik has received a number of major awards: the Canadian Institute of Forestry granted him the Canadian Forestry Achievement Award in 1979 and the Tree of Life Award in 1993, and he received a Scientific Achievement Award from the International Union of Forest Research Organizations in 2000. Two years later, he was presented with the CSE Award for Meritorious Achievement. (A more detailed account of his achievements appears in the presentation speech given on that occasion. See Mossman B. Presentation to Bruce Dancik. *Sci Ed* 2002;25(5):147.)

But Dancik's professional achievements and awards tell only part of his story.

Although many may assume that Dancik is Canadian by birth, he was born and raised near Chicago and moved to Canada in 1973 to take a teaching position at the University of Alberta. "I thought I'd come out for a year or two and see how I liked it", he recalls. When asked why he became a Canadian citizen in 1980, he stated three reasons: He "fell in love with the place", had begun feeling like an outsider in the United States, and was a "political animal" who "wanted to participate more in the society". At the time, becoming a naturalized Canadian meant relinquishing US citizenship. Dancik notes that when he crosses the Canadian-US border, officials generally assume that he went to Canada as an infant or must have been a draft dodger! "Otherwise", Dancik

jest, "why would I leave?"

Then there are Dancik's "outside" activities. Despite his long hours of work, Dancik still pursues a number of hobbies, including fly-fishing, in which an artificial fly is cast with a lightweight fishing rod, a reel, and a special line. Then, as Norman Maclean writes in his story "A River Runs Through It", "all that a rod has to do is lift the line, the leader, and the fly off the water, give them a good toss over the head, and then shoot them forward so they will land in the water without a splash in the following order: fly, transparent leader, and then the line—otherwise the fish will see the fly is a fake and be gone."

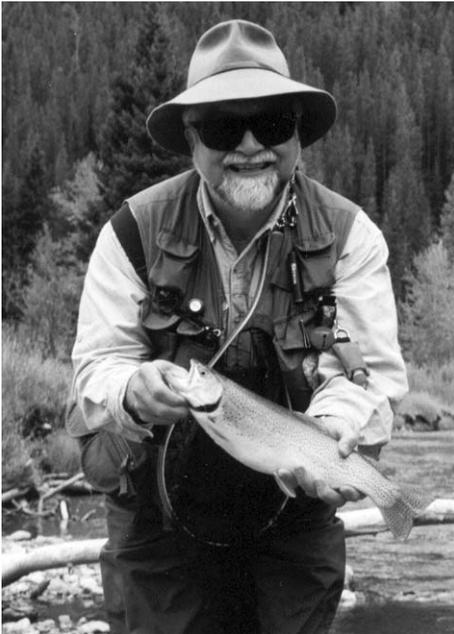
As a child, Dancik traveled with his family to their summer place in northern Wisconsin every summer. There he took up fishing, learning from his father and grandfather. "It became an early love, and it was in a forested environment, so that probably accounted for the academic [path] I chose to pursue", he says. But unlike his grandfather, who wasn't a fly-fisher, and his father, who was "not a very good one", Dancik became determined to master fly-fishing, which he did by the age of 12 or 13. His mother encouraged his interest by buying him a fly-tying kit at a discount; it was "neat, and store-bought flies were normally too expensive for kids". His father also supported his decision: Dancik still owns the beautiful handmade wooden cabinet filled with fly-tying material that his father located in the classified ads; the cabinetmaker's widow "looked at me—a kid—and said, 'Twenty dollars!' It was an incredible thing!" Dancik recalls. "That cemented that."

Tying fishing flies became an early source of summer income for Dancik. His brother printed business cards for him, and "there was a friendly tavern owner who hung the cards—with the flies attached—on his wall and sold the flies. The fly earrings were especially popular: 'Bring "her" a souvenir from your fishing trip.' . . . The tavern owner was supposed to take a portion of the profits, but I don't believe he ever took a cut."

When Dancik was too young to drive, his parents would take him to a local Wisconsin reservoir or river and fish with him, or

# Other Than Editing

continued



**Bruce Dancik**

they would drop him off and return later. Sometimes, Dancik recalls, “my folks would go to some nearby restaurant, and I didn’t want to waste the good fishing time. . . . So they’d drop me off and go eat. . . . I would fish, and they’d come back [with a meal for me] and pick me up. It became a joke in the family.” Dancik continued to earn “pin money” from tying flies and pursue his love of fly-fishing every summer through high school and college.

Now, Dancik finds it difficult to find time to fish, although he tries to set aside a few days to fish when he travels. He’s even been on fishing trips to New Zealand and Argentina. Dancik calls fishing an opportunity for contemplation, “an excuse to think about anything, a diversion, to think about things at the office, to work out solutions to problems you’ve been having without anybody bothering you. . . . To walk in the water, or along the water. . . . It’s hard to put into words, but it’s almost a religious experience.”

But you won’t find Dancik pursuing fish only on some lake or stream—he also enjoys collecting rare and antiquarian angling books. He is a “real book collector [and] a great explorer”, says Cheryl Iverson, AMA Archives Journals managing editor and self-described “book-collector groupie”.

Dancik says his love of reading comes from his mother. (“She had memorized all of her previous library card numbers because she read just about every book in the library!”) In 1962, while a University of Michigan freshman, Dancik purchased his first “collectible” book at an American Association of University Women book sale. It was a second printing (1941) of *Return to the River* by Roderick L Haig-Brown, a Canadian writer of natural history whose works include fishing and wilderness books. “It was in Fine to Very Fine condition, but without the dust wrapper, and it cost me \$1.50!” Dancik “fell in love with that style of writing” and has been collecting angling books ever since, pursuing his combined passion whenever and wherever he can. (See sidebar for his list of favorite bookstores.) In fact, having lived in places where the weather makes fly-fishing dif-

ficult most of the year, Dancik says reading angling books became “the next best thing. . . . Sometimes, I suppose, even more pleasurable than the actual fishing is the reading about it!”

Dancik notes that some collectors try to collect all the editions of just one book, such as Isaak Walton’s *Compleat Angler*. The 500-plus editions range from 2×1½-inch miniature books to “sumptuous, huge, ornate two-volume sets. . . . Some of the books even have hand-tied flies put in plates inside them!” However, Dancik’s collection contains books by a variety of authors, and he selects these books for a variety of reasons: the work itself, the publisher, or simply “interesting bindings, previous owners . . . hand-colored plates . . . etc.” When pressed to name a favorite, “with some misgivings” he listed three: the 1976 and later editions of Norman Maclean’s *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories*; anything by Roderick Haig-Brown, but especially *Measure of the Year*; and Harry Middleton’s 1989 book, *The Earth Is Enough; Growing Up in a World of Trout & Old Men*. Few books in his collection relate to his research interests, however, because “that’s too close to my daily activities. . . . I want a diversion from that.”

And it’s a serious diversion! Freelance writer and editor Seth Beckerman recalls when, during a CSE meeting in Beckerman’s hometown of Pittsburgh, he and Dancik visited a used-book store: “What I thought was interesting was that, in one store, there were probably 20 fishing books . . . [and] Bruce only bought one because he had all the others!” In fact, Dancik owns so many books that he carries an electronic catalog of his books with him, to avoid buying something he already owns. The exhaustiveness of his collection has also led him to collect ephemera—collectibles not originally intended to be saved—such as 19th- and early 20th-century railroad guides, “which often featured angling lodges and prime fishing areas”.

Although the World Wide Web has facilitated finding rare books, the proliferation of online sites has meant that many bookstores have closed, Dancik notes. He considers this a loss: His favorite book-col-

lecting is still done in bookstores, where he can “handle [books], and look at them, and see them, and wander”. He takes pleasure in “the bindings, the leathers, the gilt edges . . . the ornaments and the phenomenal illustrations. . . . It’s that thrill of the chase and finding these gorgeous physical objects that are often beautiful to behold. . . . It’s the serendipitous nature of finding a wonderful book when you weren’t looking for it. . . . [It might have just looked attractive.] . . . Somehow it caught your eye, for whatever reason. It might have fallen on your foot! You picked it up and were captivated by it, whether it was a frontispiece, some illustra-

tion, whatever. . . . On the way to the books of your professed interest, you spot something else.”

So the next time you see Dancik at a conference, feel free to ask him about his nonprofessional fields of expertise. You, too, may get “hooked”!

CLAUDIA CLARK, a 2003 American Association for the Advancement of Science Mass Media Fellow and a science and mathematics writer, prepared this profile while a Science Editor intern.

## Some of Bruce Dancik’s Favorite Bookstores

In conjunction with the accompanying article, Bruce Dancik was asked to identify some of his favorite bookstores. The resulting list, provided below, contains bookstores in the United States and Canada, arranged alphabetically by city.

### UNITED STATES

#### Tattered Cover Book Store

1628 16th St  
Denver CO 80202  
(303) 436-1070  
(800) 833-9327 toll-free  
(303) 629-1704 fax  
[www.tatteredcover.com](http://www.tatteredcover.com)

#### Bryn Mawr Vassar Bookstore

4612 Winthrop St  
Pittsburgh PA 15213  
(412) 687-3433  
[www.sumware.com/BMVBS](http://www.sumware.com/BMVBS)

#### Caliban Book Shop

410 S Craig St  
Pittsburgh PA 15213  
(412) 681-9111  
(412) 681-9113 fax  
[www.calibanbooks.com](http://www.calibanbooks.com)

#### Townsend Booksellers

4612 Henry St  
Pittsburgh PA 15213  
(412) 682-8030  
[www.townsendbooksellers.com](http://www.townsendbooksellers.com)

#### Powell’s City of Books

1005 W Burnside  
Portland OR 97209  
(503) 228-0540  
(866) 201-7601 toll-free  
(503) 226-2475 TDD  
[www.powells.com](http://www.powells.com)

#### Sam Weller’s Zion Bookstore

254 S Main St  
Salt Lake City UT 84101  
(801) 328-2586  
(800) 333-SAMW toll-free  
[www.samwellers.com](http://www.samwellers.com)

### CANADA

#### Volume II Books

12433 102 Ave  
Edmonton AB T5N 0M2  
(780) 488-2665  
(780) 488-8729 fax  
[www.volume2.ca](http://www.volume2.ca)

#### Greenwoods Bookshoppe

7925 104 St  
Edmonton AB T6E 4C9  
(780) 439-2005  
(800) 661-2078 toll-free  
(780) 433-5774 fax  
[www.greenwoods.com](http://www.greenwoods.com)

#### Nicholas Hoare Ltd

1307 rue Sainte-Catherine Ouest  
Montreal QC H3G 1P7  
(514) 499-2005  
(514) 842-4030 fax

#### Nicholas Hoare Books

419 Sussex Dr  
Ottawa ON K1N 9M6  
(613) 562-2665

#### Beacon Books & Collectables

2372 Beacon Ave  
Sidney BC V8L 1X3  
(250) 655-4447  
(250) 655-5283 fax  
[www.sidneybooktown.net/beacon.html](http://www.sidneybooktown.net/beacon.html)

#### Haunted Bookshop

9807 3rd St  
Sidney BC V8L 3A6  
(250) 656-8805  
(250) 656-3058 fax  
[www.sidneybooktown.net/haunted.html](http://www.sidneybooktown.net/haunted.html)

#### Munro’s Books

1108 Government St  
Victoria BC V8W 1Y2  
(250) 382-2464  
(888) 243-2464 toll-free  
(250) 382-2832 fax  
(888) 382-2832 toll-free fax  
[www.munrobooks.com](http://www.munrobooks.com)