

IN MEMORIAM

J. MICKEY COOPER (29 MARCH 1940–06 SEPTEMBER 2024)



J. Mickey Cooper passed away on Friday, September 6, 2024. He was born in rural Centrahoma, Oklahoma, on March 29, 1940. Mickey was the son of Sonnie and Edna (Sawyers) Cooper. He spent his early years near Lula, Oklahoma, and graduated from Tupelo High School in 1958. On August 11, 1961, Mickey married Earlene Canida, in Tupelo, Oklahoma. Together, they shared many wonderful years until her passing on February 2, 2021.

Mickey's passion for education led him to pursue higher learning at East Central State University in Ada, where he earned his Bachelor's degree. His academic journey continued at Oklahoma State University (OSU), where he attained both his Masters and Doctorate degrees in Biological Science specializing in Botany. One summer, Mickey traveled 15,000 miles in the Northwest United States collecting specimens for OSU's new herbarium.

Mickey dedicated 37 years to Cameron University as a respected educator. His influence extended far beyond the classroom, touching the lives of countless students through both his teachings and the life lessons he imparted. He served as Department Chair of the Science Department, and his legacy was honored through the establishment of the Dr. Mickey Cooper Endowed Scholarship Fund.

Dr. Cooper was responsible for the establishment of Cameron's herbarium, which has grown throughout the years to include the historic plant collection from the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge and is part of the Texas Oklahoma Regional Consortium of Herbaria (TORCH). The CAMU herbarium continues to be a vital resource utilized by botany and biology students.

Even after retirement, Mickey was always a teacher and well versed on many subjects. He loved sharing his knowledge and was always eager to learn new things. One of Mickey's biggest joys was seeing his former students later in life and knowing he played a small part in their success.

Mickey was a world traveler and loved bird hunting. A lifelong dream was fulfilled when Mickey joined George and Todd Bridges on a bird hunting trip to Paraguay in May 2023.

Throughout his entire life, Mickey loved horses, cattle, and farming cotton, wheat, and oats. He was always a farm boy at heart. Upon retirement he continued farming, his lifelong passion.

Barney Lipscomb remembrances

I started my college journey at Cameron University, Lawton, Oklahoma, in the fall of 1968. With a major in biology, I took my first botany class under Mr. Robert Ziegler who was an awesome teacher and made botany interesting and exciting. He was engaging and inspirational. I was hooked on botany until I took my first entomology class under Dr. Wayne Epperson. I was all in with collecting, pinning, and learning about insects until another botany class came along. So, my early college years involved taking required classes, and in my major, I was seesawing back and forth between zoology and botany. One year I'm all in with botany and the next year I'm back to zoology. The decision between botany and zoology was finally made for me when, in my third year at Cameron, I signed up for Aquatic and Wetland Vascular Plants. The professor was Dr. J. Mickey Cooper, and he, too, was more than an instructor—he was an inspiration. Oh, my goodness, the excitement of collecting, pressing, drying, and identifying plants was awesome and rewarding. On August 30, 1971, my first lab class for Aquatic and Wetland Vascular Plants was a field trip looking for and collecting aquatic plants. My first plant to see and collect was *Polygonum lapathifolium* L. (smartweed), and this is the first collection in my field notebook. Collection details: Cotton Co., Oklahoma, 4 mi E, 9¾ N of Walters, Oklahoma; plant growing on the edge of a tank [stock pond], *Barney Lipscomb 1*, 30 Aug 1971. I can still remember working through the

key (Waterfall, U.T. 1960. *Keys to the Flora of Oklahoma*) and identifying this collection at the University with Dr. Cooper helping me key my plant collections. I distinctly remember seeing under the microscope the distinctive forked anchor-like veins near the apex of the white to pinkish tepals. The excitement of identifying a plant and knowing its name was like a shot of dopamine. One of our extended class field trips with Dr. Cooper was for two days (1–2 Oct 1971) to southeastern Oklahoma, with our ultimate destination, the wetlands in McCurtain County. We stopped at various places along the way to collect aquatic plants. One fascinating place we stopped at was the Blue River in Johnston County, Oklahoma, 1 mile east of Connerville. Here, along the Blue River, I experienced one of those great moments that John K. Terres, editor, describes in the Introduction of a 1961 book, *Discovery: Great Moments in the Lives of Outstanding Naturalists*. I was 23 days away from my 21st birthday and the only thing I truly remember on that day is eating a birthday cake made by my mother. I will never forget my mother's handmade birthday cakes covered with icing that was made from scratch. However, on this first day of October 1971, I was about to experience something else I would never forget, a great and memorable experience and moment that has been with me all my life. Thanks to my professor—Dr. Mickey Cooper—I haven't forgotten the awe and wonder of that day. I remember walking along the river alone, enjoying the natural beauty, and carefully looking for aquatic plants. I followed the twists and turns of the river and all of a sudden, a plant 1 to 2 m tall, with the most stunning red flowers greeted my view. I was awestruck and speechless. This was truly the moment described by J.K. Terres (1961), "I believe that all naturalists at some time in their lives have had one great adventure, and that the shock, ecstasy, beauty, wonder, tragedy, or intellectual illumination of that moment, hour, or day, they carry with them the rest of their lives." The remarkable plant was *Lobelia cardinalis* L. (cardinal flower). This moment of a new discovery was recorded in my field notebook as *Barney Lipscomb 48*, 1 Oct 1971. The science of exploring, discovering, and collecting took hold of my life and I never looked back except to remember the inspiration that Dr. Cooper and Mr. Ziegler gave me. They followed me for the rest of my career and supported me every step of the way. After my M.S. in Botany from the University of Arkansas, 1975, I took my first job at the SMU Herbarium (Dallas, Texas) as Herbarium Botanist. Years later, at the invitation of Dr. Cooper, I would return to Cameron to give lectures in the Biology Department and to the Tri Beta Society (Honors Biology Society). I greatly appreciate all of the support Dr. Cooper gave me after graduation. Dr. Cooper and Mr. Bob Ziegler drove 3½ hours from Cameron (Lawton, Oklahoma) to Fort Worth, Texas, in 2001 to attend an event in which I was being awarded the Leonhardt Chair of Texas Botany, an endowed chair at the Botanical Research Institute of Texas (BRIT) that engages in Texas Botany and participates/coordinates the Illustrated Texas Floras Project. Years later, Dr. Cooper visited me at the new BRIT facilities in Fort Worth, on May 9, 2017, with his son, James, and his granddaughter, Caroline. I was very proud to show Dr. Cooper and his family the new BRIT facility as well as the botanical library and herbarium. Thank you, Dr. Cooper, for taking interest in me as a student and enriching my life. Thank you for caring. Thank you for giving of yourself.

Dr. J. Mickey Cooper, well done though good and faithful servant.



J. Mickey Cooper, Barney Lipscomb, Robert Ziegler. Photo 8 Feb 2001.