

WormEzine Vol. 2 No. 6

News and information from Mary Appelhof
about vermicomposting, worms, and other critters that live in the soil.

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For the Small Print, scroll to end.

They laughed when I said worms eat my garbage,
but I showed them how, and now thousands say the same thing

A WORD FROM MARY APPELHOF aka Worm Woman

Dear Worm Workers,

This issue of the WormEzine commemorates the life of John Buckerfield who died of cancer at age 54. I have written my own memories of John, and Dr. Ken Lee has graciously sent me the eulogy that he prepared for John's funeral. He gives a much more comprehensive understanding of John as a scientist and as a colleague than I could. I report on some highlights of my recent trip to Halifax, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island during Canada's Environment Week. Next month I will continue my discussion of Compost Teas. Flowerfield Enterprises now carries what I feel to be the best of the brewers built for the homeowner and small-scale farmer. Find out more about it in the New Products section.

Until next month. . .

Mary Appelhof

. . .Changing the way the world thinks about garbage

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1=====IN MEMORIAM=====

I learned just this morning of the death on June 13th of John Buckerfield of Adelaide, Australia. It is with great sorrow that I tell you this, for John was a much-respected colleague, a truly fine scientist, an inspiration, and a very good friend. I first met John in Avignon, France, at the International Symposium on Earthworm Ecology (ISEE4) in 1990. Prior to ISEE5 at Columbus, Ohio, in 1994, John wrote to me to arrange his post-conference travels, saying that he would like to include a visit to Kalamazoo. The week he spent with us in Kalamazoo was full of worm work, worm talk, and worm sightings.

It just so happened that Dr. Sam James, a respected taxonomist, could conveniently travel through Kalamazoo on the way from Columbus to his summer home further north in Michigan. Caton Gauthier was working for me at the time. She had just returned from a trip to Jamaica where she collected a number of unidentified earthworm specimens from the island. I was working on a National Science Foundation grant doing videomicroscopy of live earthworms and had a studio set up in our basement where I could videotape magnified images of worms, simultaneously observing them on a color monitor (a 19-inch TV set). All of us spent a memorable Sunday afternoon looking at one specimen after another, viewing the colorful images on the monitor, and having Sam narrate descriptions of the patterns of setae, genital tumescences, or the tubercula pubertatis, as he pointed them out.

We must have had a mixed culture of worms in my worm bin at the time, because we had a mystery worm we wanted to identify. It had setae all around the body, not just 4 pairs. And it moved differently than the worms we were used to looking at. John thought he knew the worm, but wasn't sure. He said he might be able to get a reference faxed to us from Australia. As it was Sunday in Kalamazoo, it was already Monday in Australia. He reached someone in the lab, and the next thing we knew we had a description and illustrations of *Perionyx excavatus*, giving Sam enough to go on to confirm its identification.

This energetic, tireless scientist got right into my favorite activity that summer. . . that of going out at night with a flashlight (torch, in John's vernacular) covered with red cellophane and looking for nightcrawlers (*Lumbricus terrestris*) in the damp grass. We spent hours hunting worms. John watched me, videocamera in hand. When I spotted a worm, I would gently get down on my knees to get closer, then finally lie down, elbows

propped on the wet ground to make a tripod support. Thus I would videotape the worms foraging for food or seeking a mate. One pair of worms was so into the act, it let us put the camera on a real tripod and just let the videotape run. It was 2 o'clock or so in the morning, so I may have gone to bed. We must have taken turns to check on them every 20 minutes or so. We were even able to remove the red cellophane from our light without noticeably disturbing the worms. The footage resulting from these nightcrawlers mating had normal coloration, with the grass colored green, rather than the dark muddy appearance of the video taken with red light. My records show that we had over 1 hour and 40 minutes of Hi8 tape of these worms. I think we gave up before they did.

John went home with a copy of "Worms Eat Our Garbage: Classroom Activities for a Better Environment," to present to a teacher in South Australia whom he knew would make good use of the book in her classroom. Where was she from? Kalangadoo! I couldn't resist autographing her book, "From the Worm Woman of Kalamazoo to the kids in Kalangadoo."

John generously hosted me during a 3 week trip to Australia the next year. He took me to meet Diane Wiseman, the Worm Woman of Kalangadoo where I participated in my first official worm sampling under the tutelage of the 3rd graders in the Kalangadoo School where most of the kids' fathers are potato farmers. John had read the report from the school's Worm Watch Project where Diane's students had counted all of the worms in a square meter of soil to the depth of a spade. When he calculated the tonnage of the earth they had literally pawed through looking for worms he thought, "Think of the amount of work these kids are willing to do. With a little bit of help on my part, I can help them set up a controlled study, learn rigorous random sampling techniques, and really make a contribution to earthworm science." John's visit to Kalangadoo with me was perhaps his 4th trip to this tiny village to assist a teacher who was committed to teaching her students about how important it is to care for our earth and its creatures. John's involvement not only gave them actual experience practicing the scientific method, it gave them face-to-face contact with a scientist doing real experiments that could benefit their farming community.

I had greatly hoped to have John come to Kalamazoo again to participate in the Vermillennium, the international conference on vermiculture and vermicomposting which brought nearly 130 scientists from 19 countries in the fall of 2000. John had already been diagnosed and was under treatment for cancer. He continued his work as he was able, but his doctor was concerned that a hard plane landing could jeopardize his already very fragile back. He sent Katie Webster in his place. We couldn't have put the finishing touches on the conference without her creative and extremely capable help. John's work was honored through Katie's clear, colorful, and dynamic presentation.

May John Buckerfield live always in the hearts of those who knew him, and inspire those who were not so fortunate.

2=====EULOGY=====

John Buckerfield

In 1966, when John was 17 years old, he came to work with me in CSIRO as a research assistant. He was fresh from High School, very shy, but bursting with enthusiasm to join in a new research group that I had come to Australia to establish. For the first time in Australia we were to do research on the effects on soils and their fertility of the then little known small animals – the worms, insects, and many others - that live in soils. I did not really have to select him from those who applied for the job – he selected himself with his obvious enthusiasm and energy.

From the beginning of his career in CSIRO it became apparent that John was an exceptionally able research assistant, with great potential. For the next 20 years we worked together, collaborating with others to develop our understanding of soil animals. We began with work on termites – most people see them as pests that damage timber in our houses, but we recognized them as soil-inhabiting animals that have profound effects on the soil. The termite work and work that followed on other groups of soil animals led John to learn many skills. He learned how to design and carry out field sampling programmes; how to collect and identify termites and other soil animals; techniques of physical, chemical, biochemical and microbiological analysis of soils; statistical techniques and how and where to make use of them in research; photography; and many other things. He never complained about the long hours we often worked, nor at the hardships we sometimes met in the field. Every task he took on was done with integrity, and with meticulous care and accuracy. All together, he became an extraordinarily able and versatile research assistant who moved easily through the CSIRO's promotion system to become an independent scientist.

Always, in his spare time, he worked tirelessly, as an individual and through many organisations, to give practical help to others less fortunate than himself.

One of the highlights of our years working together was when he and I spent four months as members of a joint Royal Society of London and French Academy of Science expedition to explore the fauna and flora of the New Hebrides Islands (now Vanuatu). I was the expedition leader and John was my assistant, and our total numbers varied between about 30 and 80. We lived for those four months in tents in the tropical rainforest, working seven days a week, mostly in uninhabited areas without roads or tracks, climbing mountains and crossing flooded rivers, in the rain and the mud. All John's skills, his cheerful and resilient nature, and his outstanding ability to befriend and relate to people, ranging from leading scientists from many countries to simple village people in their forest home, came to the fore. He played his part as an expedition scientist as well as contributing greatly to the over all success of the expedition. I was specially pleased to see him, a few years later, standing in the Royal Society's meeting room in London, in front of a portrait of Isaac Newton, who was an early President of the Society, to present a paper on New Hebrides termites. Not too many young scientists from the other side of the world are invited to present a paper there.

Over the years John and I became close friends, and I think of him as one of the best friends I have had – always reliable, honest, sympathetic and loyal. The close association we developed at work continued when I moved to other responsibilities, and through the years since I retired from CSIRO and he moved on to establish his own environmental consulting business. I shall always remember him as the shy young lad I met 37 years ago, and how he grew into the outstanding man that we farewell today. He was a remarkable man, and the world is a better place because he was here.

Ken Lee

3=====TRAVEL UPDATE FROM NOVA SCOTIA =====

Worm Woman Featured during Environment Week in Halifax and Prince Edward Island

I have just returned from a rather hectic but exciting speaking tour to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island, sponsored by the Composting Council of Canada, Halifax Department of Environment and Labor, and Island Waste Management Corporation. The week of June 2 was Environment Week in Canada and a visit from the Worm Woman from Kalamazoo was a way to bring visibility to their excellent organics collection and composting programs. I did this by teaching kids about how they could deal with food wastes on-site without having to utilize collection and centralized processing facilities. I gave my "T-shirt slide show" presentation to 6 classes of kids in 5 different schools, followed by reading "Compost, by Gosh! An Adventure with Vermicomposting." We christened an elegant new insulated worm bin with sloped roof and wooden shingles at Shambhala School in Halifax.

For those of you who haven't seen it, I developed my T-shirt slide show presentation a number of years ago to give me visuals to work with for those situations when the room couldn't be darkened, or a slide projector would not be available. I selected key images that enable me to give the basics of vermicomposting. . . an aerated container, right kind of worm, types of bedding, cocoon, worm castings, how you use worm castings to get plants to grow better. . . then developed 1-3 word captions for each image. I had these images put on t-shirts that fit into an attache case (adds eight pounds to my luggage!). For the actual presentation I open the attache case in front of the group, then throw the t-shirts out to the audience, explaining that when I say "Shirts!" everyone with a shirt has to hold it up so I can see the image. I point to the image I want to talk about first. That person has to throw the shirt to the helper standing next to me who holds the shirt up so everyone can see "slide 1." When I finish talking about that slide we repeat the process. Of course it gets a bit rowdy as the 10-year old boys try to snag the shirts out of the air when I throw them. And someone usually wants to know if they can keep the shirt, which, of course they can't. Everyone gets involved, it keeps me on my toes because every presentation is different depending on the kids, the sequence, the questions, the comments. Yet everyone comes away knowing the basic features of worm composting. I've used this show on the streets of Brooklyn, in Petaluma, in Spokane, in

Wales, and in the Pontiac Silver Dome. I developed a variance for Russia which used handkerchiefs instead of t-shirts (lighter weight) and made it bilingual in Russian and English.

To older students in an environmental club I gave a newly developed PowerPoint presentation, "Worms Eat My Garbage; they can eat yours, too!", and for the Bedeque Bay Management Environmental Association I gave another PowerPoint presentation, "Compost Teas." I got to learn about what is being done at the Maple Plains Demonstration Farm on Wednesday. A potato farmer has established a relationship with the BBMEA and others to conduct research towards sustainable practices on some of his acreage. I delighted in seeing the lovely pond dug into a wetlands. Visually it is attractive to look at the graceful curves of the pond banks, see the sedges and rushes, look at the extensive mats of sundew, see the sphagnum and other wetland plants. They have reintroduced native species and others have come in on their own, increasing the biodiversity extensively.

The media were a bit slow to pick up on the opportunity. It seems these days that media wait to determine if there is going to be a major story break before deciding to cover an event such as this. But Rick Conrad of the Halifax Chronicle-Herald wrote a very good article about the school presentations, Breakfast TV featured me and the worms, and East Link Cable channel did an interview with me in my Worm Woman hardhat and orange raingear, CBC radio did interviews in both Halifax and Charlottetown, and at least one other newspaper covered my visit. Not bad for three days, eh? But believe me, by the time I touched down in Kalamazoo after 3000 miles, 5 plane rides and a ferry ride, was I ever dragging!

4 =====WORM FARM SCAMS STILL UNFOLDING =====
 A MISSISSIPPI TAKES ACTION AGAINST CRS. Mississippi has issued orders against Combined Resource Systems (CRS), Organic Systems and Waste Solutions, Inc. and their principals for selling at least \$50,000 worth of unregistered investment contracts involving worm farms to Mississippi residents. According to Secretary of State Eric Clark, "These companies have taken what appears to be a legitimate agricultural business and turned it into a complicated financial scheme to lure unsuspecting investors. The result is that an investor puts up a lot of upfront money with very little chance of making a profit." Companies involved in the type of "buy-back" operations they offer are considered securities under Mississippi law, and, as such, must be registered through the Secretary of State's office. For more information, go to:
<http://www.sos.state.ms.us/pubs/PressReleases/Articles/WormFarmsScam.asp>

B. B&B WORM FARMS FILED FOR CHAPTER 7 BANKRUPTCY. In the meantime, the Oklahoma Dept. of Securities continues its investigations against the company. Dan Clarke, chief investigator for the Dept of Securities posted a notice to several worm message boards saying that anyone who needs any information about filing a claim in the case against them is welcome to contact him. His contact info: Daniel G. Clarke, CFE, CAMS Supervisory Investigator, Oklahoma Department of Securities, 120 North

Robinson, Suite 860, Oklahoma City, OK 73102. Tel: 405-280-7732, FAX: 405-280-7742, Email: kgc@securities.state.ok.us

C. OKLAHOMA BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY SALES ACT. If you want to set up your own business opportunity in Oklahoma, the hoops you will have to jump through to be legal are posted at this site: <http://www.securities.state.ok.us/Busopp.html>

5=====Q & A=====

I'm posting the following correspondence to give you an idea of some of the email that comes into the inbox at WormWoman.com I have changed the name to protect the writer. I guess I'll be the one in trouble if I made up a real person's name and he comes after me!

Subject: Earthworms
From: Coolkat 1459@aol.com

How long do an earthworms live?

How do composting worms help the environment?

Where would you find more composting worms in an urban or country setting?

Are earthworm parasites?

Would worm bins be a good source for urban garbage cans?

From: Mary Appelhof <mappelho@tds.net>
Subject: Earthworms
:

Dear CoolKat,

Do you have a name?

This sounds like questions for a science project to me. Can you give me a little bit of information about yourself and why you are asking these particular questions before I take the time to respond more fully?

Then, select which question you would like me to respond to and I'll do my best.

I'll wait to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Mary Appelhof

My name is [Joseph XXXXXXXXX] and I am a six grader at [St. Matthew] Scholl in [Elmwood], IL close, to Chicago. And this is a project for school and the question I want asked is how long do worms live

Dear Joseph,

That's better. The internet is massive and can be very impersonal. But if you want to learn something from someone who has expertise or knowledge about a subject you want to learn about, it is only courtesy for you to tell them something about yourself and why you want to know the answer. It also increases your chance of getting a reply.

Because most worms live underground, and it is difficult to mark them and follow an individual throughout its life, this information is hard to obtain. It also depends upon the kind of worm. Most worms probably don't live more than one or two years. They either dry out during the dry summer months, freeze during the winter, or get eaten by a predator. A nightcrawler (*Lumbricus terrestris*) lived in a protected environment in a laboratory for six years. I have heard even as long as ten. A redworm (*Eisenia fetida*) similar to that which we use in vermicomposting lived over 4 years in a laboratory.

If you want to do a long-term study and add to the science, you would need to collect a baby worm that has just hatched from its cocoon and provide a satisfactory environment for it for several years. Keep good notes. By the time you are a senior you can report your finding and I'm sure someone will pay attention to your careful work!

Good luck in the rest of your assignment.

Sincerely,

Mary Appelhof

6=====COMING EVENTS=====

A. JUNE 22-24, 2003. EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN. MICHIGAN MASTER GARDENER'S CONFERENCE. Open only to certified Master Gardeners, this annual conference brings enthusiastic plant lovers from all over the state for an ambitious series of hand-on workshops, seminars, and garden tours on the beautiful Michigan State University Campus. Mary Appelhof will be teaching workshops on how to set up a worm bin and giving her PowerPoint presentation on Compost Teas.

B. JUNE 26. BLOOMFIELD, IOWA. EARTHWORMS ELIMINATE WASTE SEMINAR. Organic Compost Solutions of Bloomfield is sponsoring a free seminar with Kelly Slocum and Jerry Guinn as featured speakers. Focus of the seminar will be on large-scale use of worms to process agricultural wastes and produce vermicompost for

agricultural soil improvement and horticultural uses. They will be introducing equipment for pre-processing the feedstock with in-vessel digesters. The pre-processed material becomes a worm food that is uniform, pathogen-free, and free of weed seeds. The seminar will be from 9:30-3:30 and is free, but pre-registration is required to ensure a seat. Call 641-680-2049, FAX 209-755-7985, or send an email to mike@compostsolutions.com Mike McClure and Chris Ball are putting this seminar together.

C. JUNE 30. CORVALLIS, OREGON. HUMAN PATHOGENS FROM LIVESTOCK MANURES. Oregon Tilth is hosting an invitation only summit to address concerns related to pathogens in compost and vermicompost derived from manures. Some of the speakers will be Richard Mathews from the National Organic Program, Dr. Steven Ingham of the University of Wisconsin, Dr. Patricia Milner, USDA/ARS, Beltsville, MD, Dr. Scott Subler of Pacific Garden Company, Dr. Steven Scheuerell and Dr. Mark Daeschel from Oregon State University. Nick Andrews is responding to inquiries at: nick@tilth.org or 503-378-0609.

D. JULY 2. KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN. MARY APPELHOF TO GIVE WORM PROGRAM FOR KIDS. Kalamazoo Public Library features programs all summer to encourage kids to come to the library. Mary Appelhof will read "Compost, By Gosh! An Adventure with Vermicomposting" by Michelle Portman at this 11 a.m. event at the Kalamazoo Public Library.

E. JULY 11, 12. HANDS-ON COMPOST TEA WORKSHOPS WITH DR. ELAINE INGHAM, HENDRIKUS SCHRAVEN, AND JEFF LOWENFELS. KIRKLAND, WASHINGTON. Sponsored by the newly formed International Compost Tea Council, these workshops cater to two audiences. Friday's workshop is for Professionals and Applicators, with 7 re-certification credits offered to applicators. Saturday's workshop is for Homeowners, Gardeners, and Do-It-Yourselfers. The Friday training includes various spray units, brewers, nozzles, techniques and innovations. On Saturday you will learn how compost tea solves numerous garden problems and promotes healthy, resilient plants and turf. You will learn techniques in what to apply, when, how much, and how often, as well as have time to get your questions answered from the top people in the field. Find out more and print out registration forms at: <http://www.intlctc.org> Or call 425-503-0213.

F. AUGUST 13, TARBORO, NORTH CAROLINA. RAISING WORMS AND PRODUCING CASTINGS FOR PROFIT workshop. Rhonda Sherman, who has done excellent work teaching people about vermicomposting through her website, through her many excellent presentations, and working with prisons in setting up mid-scale vermicomposting systems, is offering a one-day session from 9:00-5:00. She says that a lot of people have been inquiring about how to start a worm farm or make an existing one more profitable. The workshop will give an overview of the industry, markets for worms and castings, considerations for a business plan, setting up an operation, bedding materials and feedstocks, harvesting worms and castings, benefits of castings in soil and plant production, and marketing opportunities. The workshop includes a tour of a

working worm farm for castings production that processes hog manure. Her outstanding line-up of speakers with years of experience in the vermicomposting industry will be Dr. Scott Subler, Tom Christenberry, Brian Rosa, and, of course, Rhonda. For details and registration info, go to <http://www.bae.ncsu.edu/workshops> and click on the workshop title. If you have questions about the workshop content, please contact Rhonda.

G. OCTOBER 10, 11. PORTLAND, OREGON. BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN VERMICOMPOSTING. Produced by Pete Bogdanov of Vermico.com, this 2-day seminar is the most comprehensive offering available for someone who wants to become a better grower and marketer of worms, worm castings, and services in the vermiculture industry. On a large scale, vermiculture cannot be isolated from management. On a large-scale, vermiculture cannot be isolated from the regulatory environment. Without knowledge of sound business practices, one will not be able to stay in the worm business very long. Pete's Best Practices in Vermicomposting Seminar is a must for anyone wanting to become a viable player in the industry. This is an opportunity to hear the latest from top leaders in the field, to network, and to sense the pulse of what is happening in vermiculture today. <http://www.vermico.com>

H. OCTOBER 20-NOVEMBER 1. MARY APPELHOF TOUR IN CALIFORNIA. We are still finalizing dates and venues for Mary Appelhof to give presentations to teachers, compost educators, the general public, and to kids in California. She will definitely be in San Jose and Long Beach. Other venues are possible and being arranged. Call 269-327-0108 to find out what the possibilities might be for her to appear in your location.

7. =====PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS=====

A. COMPOST TEA BREWER. Compost teas are generating enthusiastic converts across the country because they get nature working for you by cycling nutrients nature's way. A well-made compost tea provides an organic solution for caring for our plants and soil to reduce the need for harmful pesticides and fertilizers.

Flowerfield Enterprises is pleased to offer THE KIS 5-GALLON system designed by Leon Hussey. This system was designed for the home gardener or grower. You supply the bucket, we provide the rest: a powerful pump for excellent aeration, a diffusion coil for producing the bubbles, all necessary tubing and connections. This system has undergone extensive testing to ensure that it multiplies all of the organisms you want in a tea, bacteria, fungi, and protozoa. Beneficial nematodes aren't likely to reproduce during the 12-hour residence time that this brewer is capable of, but repeated tests show that all the other organisms do. With the kit come 3 packages of good quality compost and food sources to make 3 batches of tea. Order more inexpensively, or use your own. (One advantage of using this combination of compost and worm castings is that it has already been tested and known to provide a good inoculum of the organisms you want.) Order from our website at <http://www.wormwoman.com> or call 269-327-0108.

B. WORMOLOGY by Michael Elsohn Ross. I highly recommend this colorful, fun, and informative book on earthworms for ages 7-12. It combines excellent photographs of earthworms with line art diagrams and pictures of gleeful children studying, mimicking,

and playing with worms. The text and illustrations describe several experiments and give guidelines on how to record data. It has a glossary and an index. "Wormology" was chosen by Science Books and Films as one of the Best Books for Children. A great thing about it is that it is inexpensive . . . only \$6.95. Order from our website at:

http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/Wormwoman_catalog_Wormology_11.html

C. SPANISH BOOK ON VERMICOMPOSTING AND RECYCLING JAM-PACKED WITH INFORMATION. "The Manual de Reciclaje, Compostaje y Lombricompostaje" by Fabricio Capistran, Eduardo Aranda, and Juan Carlos Romero is an extremely well-documented and comprehensive manual on recycling, composting, and vermicomposting. Large and small-scale systems are described. Half of the book addresses vermicomposting, and it contains a significant review of world literature. Analyses of castings, temperature, pH, moisture and other environmental requirements, uses of the products are here. This is a significant document and a valuable resource for those requiring vermicomposting information in Spanish.

http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/Wormwoman_catalog_Manual_de_Reciclaje_Co_mpostaje_y_Lombricompostaje_28.html

8=====ABOUT THE AUTHOR=====

Mary Appelhof is founder and president of Flowerfield Enterprises, which develops and markets educational materials on vermicomposting. Its publishing imprint is Flower Press, publisher of the how-to book *Worms Eat My Garbage*, the classroom activity book and curriculum guide, *Worms Eat Our Garbage: Classroom Activities for a Better Environment*, *The Worm Cafe: Mid-scale vermicomposting of lunchroom wastes*, and *Diabetes at 14: Choosing tighter control for an active life*, which is not about vermicomposting, but is an invaluable asset for anyone affected by diabetes.

9===== THE Small PRINT=====

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