

**APPS Honorary Member**  
**Dr Gretna Weste**



Gretna Weste was a member of staff of the School of Botany, University of Melbourne, from 1961 (Senior Demonstrator) to 1982 (Associate Professor). Her responsibilities involved teaching undergraduates in Botany, Agriculture and Forestry and post graduates in Plant Pathology. During her time at the School of Botany Gretna made an outstanding contribution to both teaching and research in plant pathology. She has supervised numerous PhD, Masters and Honours students many of whom have followed in her footsteps and made their own impacts in plant pathology.

Gretna's studies in plant pathology began with wood destroying fungi (Basidiomycetes) in Victorian forests of mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*). Blocks of wood were inoculated with isolates to check for subsequent decay and loss of weight, which defined those fungi that were pathogenic. Her PhD was obtained from studies with take-all disease of cereals when attacked by the Ascomycete, *Gaeumannomyces graminis*. At the time there was confusion among cereal growers and Agricultural Stations between take-all and the disease caused by the barley yellow dwarf virus.

In 1969 forest dieback was reported from seven small shrubs growing beneath stringybark eucalypts (*E. obliqua*, *E. baxteri* and *E. macrorhyncha*) in the open forest of the Brisbane Ranges in Victoria. Dieback was subsequently shown to have invaded open forests of the Grampians, Wilsons Promontory, the Otways and Kinglake. With the assistance of a succession of research students Gretna established the causal pathogen to be the Oomycete, *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, and tested Koch's Postulates within the forest. Gretna measured its pathogenicity to each native species, its rate of spread and assayed restrictive barriers.

Her subsequent research in Victorian vegetation communities led to her exceptional 30+ year study of the disease in open forests and heathlands. Most recently, and prior to her "real" retirement and move to Tasmania to be with her family, Gretna and her students had concentrated on rare endemic species under threat of extinction from this pathogen.

In 1983 Gretna was awarded a DSc for her collected works and her outstanding contribution to plant pathology and mycology. In that year she was Organising Chair of the highly successful 4th International Congress of Plant Pathology which was held in Melbourne. In 1989 she was awarded a Member in the Order of Australia (AM) medal for her research in botany and in 1992 the Australasian Plant Pathology Society made her an Honorary Member (one of only six in the Society). Gretna was made Patron of the Australasian Mycological Society in 1999.

Gretna's numerous contributions to plant pathology, botany and mycology and her unflagging energy and enthusiasm made her the obvious choice to deliver the McAlpine Lecture at the

15th Biennial Conference of the Society held in 2005 in Geelong. Gretna 's richly illustrated lecture was entitled 'A long and varied fungal foray' and she received a standing ovation at its conclusion.

Gretna passed away in September 2006, and is survived by her three children, six grandchildren and one great grandchild. Her death is a great and sad loss to the Society, but we can continue to celebrate her life through her published works and the knowledge that plant pathology in Australia has grown significantly through her contributions.

David Cahill,  
Associate Professor, Deakin University.  
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