

Conservationist was a tireless worker in fight for Isles' natural areas

Conservationist Wayne Gagne, who died May 24, saw good signs and distressing ones in the conservation of Hawaii's natural areas.

His views were published in an article published a month before his death in the journal of the American Institute of Biological Sciences, *BioScience*.

Gagne himself was a major figure in the increased interest in the Hawaiian environment.

"His vast knowledge and his personal drive are the backbone of a lot of the progress that has been made in conservation in Hawaii," said Alan Holt, acting director of The Nature Conservancy of Hawaii. "A lot of organizations and a lot of writers leaned on Wayne as the best one-stop shop for Hawaiian natural history," Holt said.

Gagne was an entomologist, who first visited Hawaii to do work on bugs in 1968. Even then, his concern for the future of the Hawaiian natural environment was clear.

"My very first meeting with him in the hallways of the museum, he explained his research and I asked him, what if his organisms (the ones he studied) became extinct. He said he'd have to give up entomology and work on conservation issues for the entire Hawaiian environment," Howarth said. Gagne did both virtually throughout his nearly 20 years in Hawaii.

Howarth said it was a pleasure to go on scientific expeditions with Gagne, because of his catalogue-like knowledge of life forms. He could identify vast numbers of plants and creatures, even well outside his own professional area. That ability also served him well in identifying previously unknown forms of life.

"He has found fossil bird bones

while looking for insects in caves, and new plants while looking for insects there. He was one of those rare people who had an eye for anything natural," said Steve Montgomery, scientist in charge of the Bishop Museum's upcoming Fatu Hiva Expedition, a major biological expedition that will probe the natural history of the Marquesas and its links to Hawaii. Gagne was to have been a member of that expedition.

In the April 1988 issue of *BioScience*.



**Jan
TenBruggencate**

Environment Writer

Gagne said he feels natural scientists have an almost moral commitment to helping protect the things they study.

Such scientists, he wrote "are usually the persons most familiar with the conservation problems confronting native organisms and ecosystems. Many scientists, in fact, owe their research careers to this native resource base. I feel that it is incumbent upon such scientists to help fight for the well-being of natural systems."

Gagne worked through the political system, through the legal system, and through organizations.

"He had a faith that the system will work and that there is a rational way to preserve these resources," said Montgomery.

Even the land managers with whom Gagne butted heads have found him reasonable, though committed.

"We disagreed on many matters, but I never lost my respect for his knowledge and dedication. We had



6-5-1988
Sunday SB&Adv.

Wayne Gagne, left, was a "one-stop shop for Hawaiian natural history." As educational specialist in natural history for the Bishop Museum, he was playing a key role in developing a full curriculum for Hawaii's schools in the natural environment. It is the kind of project, Gagne said, needed to give students "the educational tools that would as adults enable them to make informed legislation or policy to conserve natural systems" in the state.

Bishop Museum photo

agreement on purposes, but not always on means and ends," said Ron Walker, acting director of the state Division of Forestry and Wildlife.

"The biggest loss to Hawaii is his ability to keep tabs on so many issues at once, and to be effective at keeping the kettle boiling without going to the confrontational phase," said fellow entomologist Frank Howarth.

Gagne was seeing signs of improvement, and said in the *BioScience* article that a turning point was being approached with the protection of important natural areas by the national parks in Hawaii, the Fish & Wildlife Service and the state's Natural Area Reserves System.

Increasing concern, and greater funding for conservation within those areas, are hopeful signs, but hundreds of life forms are becoming extinct and will be lost before they can be protected, he said. Still more needs to be done if things are to improve dramatically, Gagne said.

One of the keys to improving the situation overall is to have Hawaii's people understand the scope of the problem, he said.

"Hawaii still suffers from a lack of a constituency educated in the conservation of natural systems," he wrote. The Islands may not be

different in that respect than the Mainland, but many important Mainland areas remain pristine and without immediate threats of being overwhelmed, he said.

Hawaii, on the other hand, has been and remains in a state of full environmental crisis.

How bad is it? Gagne wrote that of 180 native land ecosystems scientists have identified in Hawaii, 88 will soon be gone if parts of them are not soon protected as preserves. Each of those 88 represents a multitude of species.

Gagne, educational specialist in natural history at Bishop Museum, was the principal investigator in the Hawaiian Curriculum Project, funded with a \$750,000 grant, which is to develop in four years a full curriculum for Hawaii's schools in the natural environment.

It is the kind of project needed, Gagne said, to give students "the educational tools that would as adults enable them to make informed legislation or policy to conserve natural systems."

It is the kind of turning point Gagne saw as an eventual boon to what remains of native Hawaii.

It is a turning point in which Wayne Gagne played a large part.