

Dan Potter

The 2010 Recipient of the USGA Green Section Award



Bugs can be annoying but remarkable, threatening yet beautiful, and destructive but beneficial, so it's not surprising that Dr. Dan Potter, an enthusiastic and inquisitive scientist, has spent more than 30 years tracking down some of these insect scourges for the benefit of the game of golf and many other human needs.

Dan has compiled some wonderfully entertaining anecdotes, descriptions, and a brief history of his travels that are sure to engage our readers. Here is Dan in his own words:

"I was born in Ames, Iowa, where my dad was a grad student at Iowa State University (on the GI Bill after serving in the Navy). I grew up in upstate New York (Ithaca) in the Finger Lakes Region when my dad got a job teaching food science in the Agricultural College at Cornell, and my mom worked as a Head Start teacher and in volunteer work.

"I was big into Boy Scouts (was a patrol leader), fishing, hunting, especially archery and bow-hunting. I always enjoyed nature and collecting stuff — fossils, coins, stamps, rocks, etc., also model rockets, BB guns, and general teenage mayhem. Got my first bug net as a birthday gift at age 9, about the time I converted our old play house into a nature museum with road-kill skulls, dried salamanders, snake skins, and pinned bugs. A real nerd!

"I graduated Ithaca High School in 1970 and worked all the usual high school jobs — grocery stock clerk, assembling bikes and cribs for a discount store, etc. The first experience on a golf course was as a caddie (9th grade) and fishing balls out of water hazards with a smelt net and hip boots and selling them back to golfers. I worked as a door-to-door salesman, selling books after freshman year in college, and then ran out of money and hitchhiked dead broke



from Kokomo, Indiana, to New York City and then back home. Then I landed my first entomology summer job, helping to survey horseflies in the Adirondack Mountain Region. During my next three years as a student at Cornell, I worked part-time and summers as a field research assistant spraying trees and sampling pests in nurseries and Christmas tree plantations.

“I went to grad school at The Ohio State University, studied biology of plant-feeding spider mites, but had no connection whatsoever to turf. Supported myself throughout as a teaching associate, taught introductory biology to hordes of freshman, then just about every bug class in the curriculum (salary: \$2,900 per year).

“I met my wife Terri at OSU; she was a secretary in the Botany Department at the time. Got my Ph.D. in late 1978 and was hired as an assistant professor for turf and landscape entomology starting on March 1, 1979. I had never seen a white grub before coming to the University of Kentucky, but the background in nursery pests served me well. Terri earned a Master’s degree in education at the University of Kentucky and is now a first-grade teacher.

“We have two sons, Ben (a third-year medical student) and Joe (a digital editor for a film company and hopes to be the next Steven Spielberg), also a yellow lab (Maggie), and a chocolate lab grand-dog (Jack). My brother followed in my footsteps as an entomologist, too, starting his career in industry but landing an extension faculty position at the University of Kentucky about 20 years ago. He is an expert on bedbugs, termites, and other indoor pests. We are the only brothers on the same entomology faculty in the USA. My parents, now in their 80s, moved to Lexington after retirement and have become big U.K. basketball fans.

“My main hobby now is fishing, and in recent years, especially fly-fishing and fly-tying. I own a small Jon boat and canoe. I also play old-time mountain banjo, have built a hammered dulcimer, and Terri and I especially like to travel and see new places. The academic life affords opportunities for lecturing or attending scientific conferences in other countries, and we have been fortunate to visit Europe, Russia, China, Thailand, Australia, Greece, Turkey, South Africa, Brazil, all over the USA, and many other interesting destinations.

“I teach undergraduate and graduate courses and supervise graduate students working toward Master’s or Ph.D. degrees. My former students work as university faculty, entomologists in industry or the USDA, county agents, extension educators, high school teachers, and private consultants. Life is good.”



The USGA’s annual Green Section Award recognizes individuals for their distinguished service to the game of golf through work with turfgrass. For more than three decades, Dan Potter has strived with much success to manage insects on golf courses in ways that are environmentally friendly and sustainable. Along the way, he has achieved much more — the great admiration and gratitude of his many students, who always will appreciate their education and the important role Dan Potter has played in their lives.

In academia, how much better can it get than to be considered an outstanding scientist, an esteemed teacher, and a wonderful person?

USGA Executive Committee Member Steve Smyers (right) congratulates Dr. Dan Potter as the recipient of the 2010 USGA Green Section Award recognizing his distinguished service to golf through his work to manage turfgrass insects.