



Gary S. Hartshorn

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Tropical forester, dendrologist, pioneer ecologist, conservation advocate, explorer, writer, consultant, and educator, Gary Hartshorn has been in the forefront of world forestry for more than 50 years. He was elected to the Board of Directors of the World Forestry Center in 1994 and he served as President and Chief Executive Officer of the organization from 2003 to his retirement in September 2013.

Gary Spencer Hartshorn was born August 28, 1943, to Spencer “Penny” Hartshorn and Vivian Mayo Hartshorn. He grew up in New Egypt, New Jersey, on the 160-acre dairy farm owned by the Hartshorn family for more than 100 years. Gary and his younger siblings Judy and Rich were outdoors continuously playing games and exploring nearby fields and woods. Vivian Hartshorn was the local 4-H leader and Gary recalls a project planting small white pine and Norway spruce for future Christmas trees.

Organized sports offered a welcome outlet for Gary. His father played semi-pro baseball for a time and Gary lettered in both baseball and basketball. In 1961, he received a basketball scholarship to attend Moravian College. A basketball career was not in the cards and he discovered that courses in ecology and botany were a good match for his love of the outdoors and growing scientific interest in plants. The field trips, he said, were “eye opening.” Gary was caretaker of the college greenhouse that provided his first exposure to exotic tropical plants – and a small paycheck. He earned his B.S. in biology. In 1993, the trustees of Moravian College honored him for lifetime achievement in his field.

To continue his botanical studies, Gary entered North Carolina State University. Loss of the state’s biodiversity due to development was a subject of intensive research at the university and Gary was accepted as a graduate student by Dr. A. W. Cooper. “We dragged those kids all over hell and beyond,” Cooper reported. Gary thrived on the fieldwork and close collaboration with other highly motivated students. Art Cooper became a friend and mentor by encouraging Gary to look at research opportunities in the tropics.

During the summer of 1967, Gary enrolled in the tropical ecology “fundamentals” course offered in Costa Rica by the Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS) that was supported by the National Science Foundation. He purchased a Beseler Topcon 35mm SLR camera and packed his bags for 8 weeks of field studies. “To this day,” he says, “I easily remember the moist tropical air that greeted me at the open plane door upon my arrival.”

The OTS course was another eye-opening experience for Gary. Lectures by experts in their disciplines, long hikes, field problems, new sites and colleagues, and “minimal sleep” offered an attractive preview to his future profession. “There were so many unanswered questions and so much we did not know,” he said. “The prime goal of OTS was to ‘turn on’ young, impressionable graduate students to tropical ecology. It sure worked for me.” Gary continued his affiliation with OTS for more than 40 years.

Back in North Carolina, Gary met a bright, attractive, and determined graduate student named Lynne Cooper. Lynne loved adventure and was an excellent writer, editor, cook, and host. Gary and Lynne married in 1967, and three smart children soon followed: Tony (1968), Thyra (1969), and Tiki (1970).

Gary completed his M.S. in botany and was asked first to help teach the OTS summer ecology courses (1968) followed by an invitation to study tropical dendrology with Dr. Leslie Holdridge. While in Costa Rica he was invited to enter the Ph.D. program in the University of Washington’s College of Forest Resources. Gary drove to Seattle in 1968, Lynne followed with Tony, and they all bunked for a time at the college’s Pack Forest near Mount Rainier till they could find housing in Seattle.

Part of Holdridge’s course was held at the remote Finca La Selva (“Jungle Farm”) near Puerto Viejo. Owned by Holdridge since 1953, La Selva was one of the last tracts of primary lowland rainforest remaining in Costa Rica. Access at the time was by dugout canoe preceded by a long and torturous drive over mountain “roads.” Gary was enchanted by the possibilities at La Selva and began a study of the population dynamics and ecological life history of *Pentaclethra maculosa*, the dominant tree in the old-growth forest.

Prior to completing his Ph.D., Gary proposed post-doctoral research to study the frequent “tree-fall gaps” in the forest at La Selva. Within days of graduation “We loaded our kids in the van and drove five thousand miles to Costa Rica” he says. Lynne set up house in San José and Gary worked at La Selva ten days at a time.

With steep terrain, biting insects, leeches, and venomous *Fer de Lance* and *Bushmaster* snakes occupying his study sites, safety was always a primary concern. After several close calls with co-workers, Gary quickly discovered the most dangerous animal in the tropical forest to be “a Gringo with a machete.”

Gary honed his Spanish-language skills by reaching out to the local “Ticos” he encountered in the field. When the wife of a colleague—a native Spanish speaker—declared: “Gary, you speak like a campesino!” he was delighted. Mena Whitmore became his Spanish teacher and life-long family friend.

He credits colleagues Rafael Chavarría at La Selva and Juan Quijano in Peru as being consummate woodsmen and teachers. “They knew the local trees, they could track animals, recommend medicinal plants, and never get lost in the forest. I learned so much from them.”

Gary Hartshorn has collected at least 12 plant species new to science. Three tropical trees have been named in his honor: *Macrobium hartshornii*, *Meliosma hartshornii*, and *Ocotea hartshorniana*. When British television host Sir David Attenborough visited La Selva to film segments of the “Life of Mammals” series, he was hoisted by a system of pulleys and counterweights 100 feet up into the forest canopy for a dramatic camera shot. “THIS,” he decreed, “is what most people would think of as a REAL forest.” The tall tree Sir David perched in was *Ocotea hartshorniana*.

Gary went on to publish the first valid plant population study (Hartshorn 1975), and the first estimate of turnover rate for an old-growth tropical forest (Hartshorn 1978). His career and reputation as a world-class scientist was launched. Coming full circle, the University of Washington presented Gary Hartshorn the Honored Alumnus Award in 2009.

Holdridge invited Gary to be an associate at the Tropical Science Center in San José to consult on tropical forestry. Between 1974 and 1988, he consulted in Latin America, Tanzania, Nepal, Thailand, and Australia.

In 1978, the Institute of Current World Affairs (ICWA) selected Gary as a “Forest and Man Fellow” to expand his forest knowledge of the Amazon Basin, visiting Daniel Ludwig’s Jari Project, upriver from Belem, Brazil. He attended the 8th World Forest Congress in Jakarta, Indonesia. Gary was an ICWA Fellow through 1982, later serving as a trustee and chairman of the board.

Gary was instrumental in establishing the Leslie R. Holdridge Arboretum at La Selva and assembling a remarkable collection of 240 native tree species representing 60 families and 171 genera. He worked to improve the rustic facilities at La Selva, and to add critical parcels of land for research and conservation. Today, the La Selva Biological Station is known as one of the premier field stations in the world. The “Sendero Hartshorn” (Hartshorn’s Trail) can be found, naturally, in the heart of the La Selva forest.

In 1989, Gary became the Founding Director of the Biodiversity Support Program with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), The Nature Conservancy, and World Resources Institute. With their children in college, Gary and Lynne moved to Washington DC to build the US-based program for research and conservation in developing countries. After a year, Gary became WWF’s Vice President for Science, with frequent travel and speaking engagements around the world.

Gary organized scientific expeditions and tours for donors and dignitaries. He hosted Prince Philip’s visit to the remote Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve. After great views of the resplendent quetzal, the Prince requested that Gary accompany him for the return to San José (“How could I say no?”) On the 4-hour return trip, Gary maintained a spirited conversation with the Prince about conservation priorities for tropical forests.

President George H. W. Bush appointed Gary to the U.S. Joint Commission on the Environment in 1991 to monitor environmental conditions and policies in the Panama Canal Zone. Gary continued service under President Bill Clinton and was elected chairman of the commission in 1993 and again in 1998.

Gary published a prescient work on climate change “Possible Effects of Global Warming on the Biodiversity of Tropical Forests” (Hartshorn 1992). He was elected President of the Association for Tropical Biology (1989).

After seven years in DC, Gary became Executive Director of OTS based at Duke University in 1996. Before returning to North Carolina, Gary and Lynne spent 101 days traveling around the world with the Semester-at-Sea program. Gary instructed three college courses, advised students, and led forest tours when ashore. He was voted the “outstanding professor” of the voyage.

For seven years, Gary led OTS as the number of participating institutions grew to 65, adding universities in Australia, Mexico, Peru, and South Africa. More than \$20 million in new grants and contracts were received. Education programs were expanded and new facilities were added at several field stations. A new headquarters building was constructed at the University of Costa Rica.

Gary was appointed Professor of the Practice of Tropical Ecology at Duke University’s Nicholas School of the Environment. In 1999, he was selected by the Raleigh News and Observer as “Tarheel of the Week.” Gary served as US Scientific Liaison Officer for the Center for International Forestry Research and President of the American Institute of Biological Sciences.

Gary returned to the Pacific Northwest in 2003 to become President and CEO of the World Forestry Center. He led the \$7.5 million campaign to complete the renovation of the center’s iconic 20,000 square foot exhibition hall in Portland’s Washington Park. After six months of construction, the building was re-opened in 2005 featuring needed improvements to infrastructure and meeting spaces. All new exhibits were installed on two floors. “We brought the museum into the 21st century” he said.

Gary curated temporary exhibits and championed new events for families. He completed the acquisition of the 55-acre Schaefer Memorial Forest in Washington County to be used for outdoor education. A highly acclaimed “Forests of the World” curriculum guide for teachers was developed for use in classrooms around the country. He served as scientific advisor for visiting forest researchers in the World Forest Institute’s international fellowship program.

He led the World Forestry Center board of directors to annual meetings in Canada, France, Lithuania, Australia, North Carolina, and Portland OR. He worked with legendary lumberman John Hampton and other directors to significantly increase the endowment to permanently support education programs. He chaired the annual “Who Will Own the Forest?” conference for many years, and hosted the national conventions of the Society of American Foresters, the American Tree Farm System, and the Ecological Society of America. He spoke at conferences in Australia, Ecuador, Peru, and China. Selected to deliver the prestigious Starker Lecture at Oregon State University, Gary revisited the topic that first brought him to Oregon in 1990: “Will Tropical Forests Survive the 21st Century?”

Nine months after he retired from the World Forestry Center, Gary was named a Fulbright Scholar at the National University of Colombia in Bogotá. During his remarkable career, Gary has been a natural leader, collaborator, and catalyst. He was invited to present at 180 professional meetings,

authored more than 250 scientific papers, and has worked on the ground in the forests of 35 countries.

The Society of American Foresters recognized Gary's contributions to international forestry with the Sir William Schlich Memorial Award for 2014. Gary Hartshorn is an authentic "World Forester."

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