

MARGARET S. COLLINS

(1922 - 1996)

Fields: Behavioral
Ecology; Taxonomy

Subject: Termites

Nationality: American

Entomologist
of the
Month



Margaret S. Collins was the first African American woman to earn a PhD in entomology, specializing in termite diversity. She was also a civil rights activist. Throughout her career, Dr. Collins studied many features of termite biology, including the evolution of desiccation resistance, heat tolerance, defensive behaviors, and species abundance in virgin and disturbed tropical rain forests. She discovered the Florida damp wood termite (*Neotermes luykxi*), and a species native to the Antilles (*Parvitermes collinsae*; pictured) was named in her honor. As a Black woman in the 20th century, Margaret endured the full effects of racism, receiving racist epithets and having a lecture on Biology and Equality canceled by a bomb threat. Working against these pressures, she was a strong advocate for social equality throughout her life. Dr. Collins volunteered to drive people to work during the Tallahassee Bus Boycott of 1956, and organized a widely-cited symposium on "Science and the Question of Human Equality" in 1979. Dr. Collins was a testament to leadership, genius, and perseverance; her example is an inspiration to all scientists to consider and engage with the broader context of their lives.

References:

- Lewis, VR (June 2016). "Child Prodigy, Pioneer Scientist, and Women and Civil Rights Advocate: Dr. Margaret James Strickland Collins (1922-1996)". *Florida Entomologist*. 99 (2): 334-336
- Warren, W (1999). "Black Women Scientists in the United States". Indiana University Press. pp 52-56
- This factsheet was produced by Sean Bresnahan, a Penn State Integrative Pollinator Ecology graduate student

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