The untimely death of F. Prashantha Amerasinghe on 7 June 2005 in Colombo, Sri Lanka came as a deep shock to those of us who knew him as a colleague at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, where he spent some of his most productive years as a scientist, teacher and mentor of remarkable intellectual breadth. He was 57. His death has deprived the Sri Lankan scientific community of one of the most influential zoologists. His remarkable contributions to the advancement of medical entomology in general and mosquito taxonomy in particular, earned him a reputation as one of Sri Lanka’s foremost scientists. His death has left a deep void in the scientific community, and it will always remain a source of sadness to all those who were privileged to have known him.

Prashantha, as he was known to us, was born on 14 July 1948 in Colombo into a distinguished and erudite Catholic family. His father, the great scholar, Cathbert Amerasinghe, held the chair of Professor of Western Classics at the University of Peradeniya. As a dutiful Catholic, Prashantha began his early education at St. Anthony’s College, Kandy, where his achievements as a gifted student earned him the respect of his peers and pointed the way to a bright future. Although he was selected to study medicine, he rejected it in favour of zoology, which he loved. He entered the University of Peradeniya in 1967 and had the privilege of studying under the late Hilary Cruz. Having such an outstanding mentor as Cruz was perhaps the most important event in the career of Prashantha at the university. In many instances, distinction often breeds distinction. He was a brilliant student with an indefatigable spirit and a genuine enthusiasm for zoology, which he had acquired the ability to communicate to other students without conscious effort on his part. He specialized in entomology and graduated with a first class in 1971. He was recruited as Assistant Lecturer at the Department of Zoology, University of Peradeniya, from where he proceeded to the United Kingdom on a Commonwealth Scholarship to pursue his postgraduate research in the field of entomology at the University of Bristol. He received his Ph D in 1977.

Prashantha returned to Sri Lanka and resumed his academic career at the University of Peradeniya as Lecturer in Zoology. It was here that he established himself as an inspiring teacher and a first-rate scientist. It was the late W. Fernando who observed that ‘teaching without research was like looking through a lens-less telescope’. Prashantha enriched his lectures with the findings from his research, and always kept his students informed of the latest developments in the field of entomology. He had a distinguished academic career at the university, and at the young age of 48, was appointed Professor of Applied Zoology. His influence stemmed from a combination of innate intelligence, considerable scientific

Academics are among the most contentious of people, but Prashantha was fearless against even the most obstinate and obdurate. His behaviour in the face of dissent reminds me of an African proverb, ‘The croaking of the frogs does not hinder the elephant as he drinks’. The sheer force of his brilliance meant that there were some who felt dwarfed in his presence. He was, however, extremely sympathetic to young scholars and devoted much time in supervising and guiding their research. Many of them now hold important research and administrative positions both in Sri Lanka and abroad. He took the responsibility for producing good research workers out of raw graduates. He had an uncanny knack of extracting information from students, which they did not even know they had. He was able to inject excitement and liveliness into anyone who was fortunate to have worked under him. He will always be remembered as an outstanding administrator with a mind comprehensive in its grasp of things simple and precise.

As a scientist who left his mark on the science of his generation, Prashantha received many academic honours related to his work on the mosquito. His research on this terrible insect – the so-called ‘angel of death’ – contributed much to our understanding of the taxonomy, ecology and epidemiology of the mosquito in Sri Lanka. The study proved most rewarding, brought him international recognition and respect. From being a consultant in the Sarvedaya Malaria Control Project in 1988, Prashantha quickly built up a reputation as one of the foremost experts in the field of medical entomology in Sri Lanka. The World Health Organization recruited him as an advisor to the International Irrigation Management Institute (IIMI) in 1991. From then on, there was no turning back: success in research brought recognition and rewards. Prashantha finally ended up as the Principal Researcher and Leader, Water Health & Environment Theme, International Water Management Institute (IWMI), with Headquarters in Colombo – a position he held from 2000 until he passed away.

Although his primary research focus was on the epidemiology of mosquito-borne diseases, Prashantha maintained an active interest in a variety of disciplines that included conservation of biodiversity, pri-
matology, ornithology and wildlife biology. It was during 1979–80, when we were asked to carry out an assessment of the environmental impact of the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project in Sri Lanka, that I came to appreciate the depth of his knowledge about birdlife in the country. He was an excellent spotter of birds, and he would identify them from their calls, colours and flight patterns. In the field he was relaxed, talkative and jovial. His study of the identification of mammals of Sri Lanka based on the structure of their hair, remains a classic.

Prashantha brought a characteristic intensity of purpose to everything he did and a determination to succeed against all odds. His research output was phenomenal: over 80 peer-reviewed papers, numerous presentations at international symposia and conferences, and a book entitled *Malaria in Sri Lanka: Current Knowledge on Transmission and Control*, co-authored with F. Konradsen, W. Van der Hoeck and P. H. Amerasinghe. He spent two years (1990–92) as Visiting Associate Professor in the Department of Entomology, University of Maryland, USA. In 2005, IWMI conferred on him posthumously, the outstanding scientist award for making major contributions towards the improvement of water and land resources management in Sri Lanka. Despite the countless awards and accolades, Prashantha remained a modest man who refused to let success go to his head; he lived a simple and unostentatious life.

An important influence on Prashantha was his wife Priyanie, who supported him in sickness and in health. Married in 1978, they were both a well-matched couple, given their mutual interests in classical music, art, theatre, literature and horticulture, especially a love for orchids and roses. Prashantha enjoyed reading, acting, singing and listening to music. He was a creature of habit and punctuality was one of his virtues. He was of delicate health, and was highly sensitive to changes in weather. We used to jokingly refer to him as the human barometer, for a slight change in the weather would be reflected in his attire.

All of us were sad to see him in his final days at the hospital when he was ill. We all hoped and prayed that he would pull through. But he met the knowledge of impending death with great mental and physical courage. His death was one of the most distressing events in my life, and it has robbed us of a distinguished scientist and a decent human being. Prashantha touched many lives. He is survived by his wife, and two children.

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FORM IV

Particulars of Current Science—as per Form IV under the Rule 8 of the Registration of Newspapers (Central) 1956.

1. Place of Publication: Bangalore

4. Publisher’s Name, Nationality and Address: P. Balaram

   Indian

   Current Science Association, Bangalore 560 080

2. Periodicity of Publication: Fortnightly

5. Editor’s Name, Nationality and Address: P. Balaram

   Indian

   Current Science Association, Bangalore 560 080

3. Printer’s Name and Address: P. Balaram

   Current Science Association, Bangalore 560 080

   Current Science Association, Bangalore 560 080

6. Name and Address of the owner:

   Current Science Association

   Bangalore 560 080

I, P. Balaram, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge.