

YALE DAWSON BIOGRAPHY

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Dawson, Dr. Elmer Yale (1918–1966)—specialist in cacti and marine algae—starting at a very young age, an explorer of cacti in South America and Mexico, discovering new *Mammillaria* and *Cephalocereus* species in his travels.



Born in Creston, Iowa USA on 31 March 1918, Elmer **Yale** Dawson's two botanical passions became the study of cacti and seaweeds. Moving to Long Beach, California with his family when he was only four years old, he became a junior member of the Cactus and Succulent Society of America (CSSA) at age 14. Due to his scientific interest in cactus plants he obtained a permit to import cacti in 1933, as was pointed out in that year's CSSA Journal by editor Scott Edson Haselton (1895–1991). Following the California March 1933 earthquake his parents allowed him to receive a couple dump-truck loads of rubble into the front yard to make a cactus bed. This led him and his father to begin making trips to Baja California to collect plants for his cactus garden.

When it became time for Yale to attend a university, CSSA's first president, Arthur Duvernoix Houghton (1870–1938), recommended the study of botany under Willis Linn Jepson (1867–1946) at the University of California, Berkeley. It was here that he received a PhD degree with a thesis on marine algae in 1942. Yale became a professor at universities in Hawaii and southern California; a research botanist in California at Allan Hancock Foundation, Los Angeles County Museum, at Beaudette Foundation for Biological Research near Santa Barbara, at San Diego Museum of Natural History; and finally curator of cryptogams at Smithsonian Institute in 1965.

Yale was a specialist in marine algae and cacti. His cactus explorations took him into Baja California, Mainland Mexico, Brazil, Ecuador, Galapagos Islands and Peru. Cacti species discovered and described by Yale were:

Cephalocereus apicicephalum discovered in Oaxaca, Mexico in 1947 and described by him in 1948.

Cephalocereus (Pilosocereus) machrisii discovered in Brazil in 1956 and described by him in 1957.

Cephalocereus (Pilosocereus) quadricentralis discovered in Oaxaca 1947 and described by him in 1948.

Mammillaria duoformis discovered in Oaxaca 1947 and described by him and Robert Theodore Craig (1902–1986) in 1948.

Mammillaria (karwinskians ssp) nejapensis discovered in Oaxaca 1947 and described by him and Robert Theodore Craig in 1948.

One cactus species from Mexico was named in his honor by Helia Bravo-Hollis in 1965: *Melocactus (curvispinus ssp) dawsonii*.

Curt Backeberg (1894–1966) named the genus *Neodawsonia* in honor of Yale Dawson in 1941; however, it later became a synonym of *Cephalocereus*.

Yale became a member of International Organization for Succulent Plant Study (IOS) in 1963. He received the prestigious CSSA Fellow award in 1965. Yale was a prolific writer—with a number of journal articles and books to his credit.

Elmer Yale Dawson died by drowning in the Red Sea at Hurghada, Egypt on 22 June 1966 while collecting algae specimens.

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