



# STEALING TIME

[ BUY THE VIDEO → ]

Behind the Series

Aging All-Stars

Living Longer

Ask the Experts

Teaching Resources

Links

0

25

50

75

100

Mehli Mehta

Ernst Mayr

Mary Feeney

AGING ALL-STARS!

ERNST MAYR



For some successful agers, novelty is a way of life. Ninety-four year-old biologist Ernst Mayr, Alexander Agassiz Professor of Zoology, Emeritus, at Harvard University, lives in an intellectual Magic Kingdom.

"I always had a tremendous breadth of interest," explains Mayr. "I was interested in everything, I always wanted to know everything, read everything, and that included not just science but literature, the arts. I'm still very active."

Mayr's education truly began in 1926, when he graduated from the University of Berlin. He joined several expeditions to the New Guinea area, where he researched native birds, and from that point, his interest in biology blossomed.

Over his scientific career, Mayr has compiled a list of more than 40 scholarly publications, and won numerous awards. Among these are the Balzan Prize, which he won in 1983 at age 78; the International Prize for Biology, which he won in 1994 at age 89; and the 1999 Crafoord Prize. Together, these three awards comprise what is known as biology's triple crown.

Harvard colleague Stephen Jay Gould has described Mayr, who is best known for clarifying how a new species forms and adapts to changes in its environment, as "the greatest living evolutionary biologist."

As winning the Crafoord Prize indicates, Mayr isn't showing any signs of slowing down. In fact, he continues to work every day.

"I'm writing small papers," says Mayr. "I'm writing reviews. I answer an enormous amount of correspondence. And I'm working on two books."

If Mayr has anything to do with it, he'll maintain his disciplined regimen until, he explains, "I leave my office feet first."

While he remains dedicated to his work, Mayr admits that aging has made certain aspects of his job more difficult.

"There are many things where I am no longer as good as a younger person," relates Mayr. "The retrieval of names, has become very much of a problem and some extremely well known names are suddenly, I'm stumped and I can't think of them."

"I still have a very good memory for things from way, way back. Certainly things pop out of my memory that happened to me in let's say, 1914. So there is still quite a bit of my storage, but it doesn't include names."

[back to top](#)

[Home](#) | [Behind the Series](#) | [Aging All-Stars](#) |  
[Living Longer](#) | [Ask the Experts](#) | [Teaching](#)  
[Resources](#) | [Links](#) | [PBS Online](#)