



## **ABOUT E. V. KOMAREK, JR.**

**J. Larry Landers**

Edwin V. Komarek, Sr. was born in Chicago on June 4, 1909. He spent his boyhood in suburban Oak Park, Illinois at the time when much open prairie and forest was still present. In his youth Ed was strongly influenced by the fire exclusion movement and, as a boy scout, volunteered to help beat out wildfires in nearby preserves. Soon after graduation from Oak Park High School he joined the Chicago Academy of Science, which provided financial means to obtain collegiate training in zoology at the University of Chicago. As museum mammalogist he authored several papers published in scientific journals including descriptions of two new subspecies.

While conducting a mammal survey through the South he became acquainted with Herbert L. Stoddard, Sr. and in 1934 became Stoddard's assistant in the Cooperative Quail Study Association headquartered at Sherwood Plantation in Thomasville, Georgia. With the combination of Stoddard's influence coupled with his new experiences in southern pine forests, Ed Komarek began to realize the full breadth of fire as a natural process. Controversy over "control burning," as it was then called, stimulated his thinking in fire ecology and ignited his aggressive nature! Many of the Association's management trials illuminated the influence of prescribed burning on wildlife-plant interactions.

Ed Komarek and Betty Barker were married in 1935. The couple raised two children at their Birdsong Plantation, E. V. Komarek, Jr. and Betsy. From 1945-1988, he was employed as general manager of Greenwood Plantation where he obtained practical experience in coordinating management of quail, timber, and agriculture. The plantation became widely recognized for its part in developing the first hybrid corn fully adapted for the southeastern Coastal Plain, and for its artistic approach to blending sustained forestry with care of natural communities. Greenwood became a magnet for university groups involved in natural resource management as well as ecological studies. Ed Komarek lectured in the field to literally thousands of students over the years. During the same time period he also served in positions with the Georgia Game and Fish Commission and national agricultural organizations.

His unbounded enthusiasm became focused with the founding of Tall Timbers Research Station (1958), an institution conceived years before by Stoddard, and funded by friend and benefactor Henry L. Beadel, who had been heavily involved in the Quail Association. Ed Komarek played a central role in the organization from its inception. To stimulate awareness of a most neglected ecological subject, he organized the Tall Timbers Fire Ecology Conference series, which began in 1962. This was the very first professional meeting in the United States to fully address the beneficial effects of appropriate burning upon natural resources. A parallel set of conferences was held by the Research Station on ecological control of agricultural pests. Ed soon began to travel widely in search of conference speakers and eventually delivered lectures in 24 states within the U.S. and in 14 different countries. He authored more than 80 papers on a wide variety of subjects. Among his many awards for scientific achievement was an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Science from Florida State University (1971).

More than anyone else, E. V. Komarek has promoted the concept of fire as one of nature's most potent evolutionary and ecological forces. Few people have ever stirred such an awakening in the ecological sciences; fewer still have pressed onward to see their efforts applied to wildlands across so many regions of the earth.