



Jørgen Kirkegaard, 2003

## Obituary

### **Jørgen Bagger Kirkegaard (1920–2006)**

Jørgen Bagger Kirkegaard was born on the 18th of November, 1920 in Frederiksberg, a town just west of Copenhagen, Denmark. He was the only child of an elementary school biology teacher, Immanuel Kirkegaard, and his wife Oda, née Simonsen.

His father's profession may have influenced his decision, after completing high school in 1939, to study natural history and geography at the University of Copenhagen. He received the equivalent of a PhD degree in 1947, after having completed a thesis on the occurrence of hermaphroditism in polychaete annelids.

Following graduation Jørgen immediately found employment as a research assistant at the Danish Biological Station, later known as the Fisheries and Marine Research Institute of Denmark.

During these years he mainly worked on fish biology, collecting and analyzing field data for a major programme that studied the feasibility of transplanting stocks of plaice from the Limfjord to the Lesser and Greater Belts. It was also during his time at the Danish Biological Station that he met Titte Charlotte Busch, whom he married in January of 1950.

Jørgen Kirkegaard would probably have been lost to polychaetology, had it not been for the sudden opportunity that arose for him to participate in the historical Danish *Galathea* Expedition, which circumnavigated the globe from 1950 to 1952. He himself joined the expedition in Luanda, Angola in December of 1950 and disembarked in Mombasa, Kenya in March of the following year, a trip which included shore leave in Cape Town, South Africa which by all accounts was highly memorable. He once told me of his pride in having impressed Anton Bruun, the leader of the expedition, by being able to identify polychaetes on board the ship on the same day they were captured, using his trusted volumes of Fauvel's *Faune de France*.

In addition to Anton Bruun, Jørgen met several other researchers from the University of Copenhagen during this expedition, such as the carcinologist Torben Wolff and the malacologist Jørgen Knudsen. This appears to have prompted him to leave his employment at the Fisheries and Marine Research Institute in 1954 and take a job at the university. Three years later he was transferred to the Zoological Museum and was officially appointed as an associate professor in 1962. He held this position until retiring in 1990, but continued to work at the museum as a research associate until 2005, when his health began to severely limit his mobility.

While employed at the Zoological Museum, Jørgen was the curator of Annelida and various smaller phyla. On several occasions he took the opportunity to participate in further scientific cruises: with *Dana* to East and West Greenland in 1961, with *Eastward* to the Sargasso Sea in 1972, with *Shackleton* to the Bay of Biscay in 1977, and with *Discovery* to West Africa in 1979.



Jørgen Kirkegaard enjoying a quiet moment during a marine biological field course in Frederikshavn, 1959.

Jørgen Kirkegaard's first publications dealt with Danish fisheries research, in particular the translocation experiments with plaice. From 1954 he began to publish on polychaetes, although strictly speaking he was not aware that the pogonophorans, which were the subject of his first non-fish papers, were actually polychaetes. At that time and until the 1990's the phylogenetic status of Pogonophora was a matter of considerable debate, even as to whether they should be regarded as protostomes or deuterostomes. Jørgen himself did not participate in this debate, preferring to limit himself to descriptive work. This included describing the pogonophorans from the *Galathea* Expedition (most notably the new genus and species *Galathealinum bruuni*), as well as providing new reports of the group from the Skagerrak, between Denmark and Norway.

In a sense, Jørgen Kirkegaard may be seen as one of the last representatives of the Pierre Fauvel school of polychaetology, i.e., the view that most polychaete species demonstrate great intraspecific variability and have wide areas of distribution. This can be seen in his important contributions to the study of abyssal and bathyal polychaetes. In a series of taxonomic papers on deep-sea polychaetes he paid particular attention to their patterns of distribution and repeatedly reached the conclusion that many species were more or less cosmopolitan, for example occurring in the Pacific, Indian, and Atlantic Oceans. In this he was often met with opposition by other polychaete specialists, but discussions were frequently muddled because Jørgen also tended to have a rather broad interpretation of shallow-water species. Where criticism of the latter was probably justified, there is growing evidence that many abyssal and bathyal species may in fact have very large areas of distribution and Jørgen should be acknowledged for drawing attention to this issue.

Jørgen Kirkegaard published a total of 59 papers in English in refereed journals, of which 32 were on polychaetes, the others mainly concerned with fish biology. Of his polychaete papers, 5 treated pogonophorans and 10 were about other deep-sea polychaetes. In addition to these, he wrote a large number of popular science articles on invertebrates and fish in Danish.

In 1979 Jørgen received the title of Doctor of Science at the University of Copenhagen for his work on the polychaete fauna of the central North Sea, in particular the area that included the Dogger Bank. The material he identified had been collected in 1950–55 as part of a larger investigation into which food resources were available to local fish stocks. The main focus of his thesis was an analysis of the population density and distribution of polychaete species in the area, but the most well known part of it is probably his short paper on the use of year rings in the jaws of nephtyids to determine their age.

Jørgen was one of the leading figures in the early history of the International Association of Polychaetologists. Thus, during the inaugural meeting in Sydney in 1983 he agreed to host the Second International Polychaete Conference in Copenhagen in 1986. Following this he was appointed as the president of our association, from 1986 to 1989.

He was heavily involved in other international research organizations as well, most importantly as the chairman of the Danish National Committee of IUBS, the International Union of Biological Sciences, from 1980 to 1987. He also served as the chairman of the Danish arm of UNESCO's MAB Programme, Man and the Biosphere, from 1986 to 1997, and was the chairman of the Danish Natural History Society from 1972 to 1978.

Throughout his career, Jørgen immensely enjoyed any opportunity to teach and was highly appreciated by his students. Even after he came to the Zoological Museum, he continued to teach biology outside the university, particularly at the national teachers college. At the university he is something of a local legend due to the numerous courses he taught on marine biology at the university field station in Frederikshavn practically every summer from 1948 to 1983. From 1957 to 1983 he was furthermore responsible for the administration of that station.

Jørgen Kirkegaard died on the 2nd of March, 2006, and is survived by his son Bo (born 1952) and his daughter Charlotte (born 1957). We who knew him more closely will remember him as a very kind and pleasant man who always enjoyed the company of others.

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