



IN MEMORIAM
George R. Abbe
1943–2013

George R. Abbe, a long-time champion of the National Shellfisheries Association (NSA), past President, and Honored Life Member, died after a brief illness on August 2, 2013. To the end, George was one of the most active and dedicated members of the society and his loss was an unanticipated blow to the community. George is survived by his wife, Linda, who has also been very much a part of the NSA family; and his daughters, Sherry (and husband, Steve McCrystal and grandsons Sean, Kyle, and Brendan) and Angie (and husband, Kevin and granddaughters Erin and Alison). George was perhaps the most gracious, considerate, and understated member of the NSA, reflecting the memories of other “gentleman titans” in our society’s past. No words can fully summarize the person, his life’s work, his service, or his friendship.

A FIELD BIOLOGIST FROM THE START

George was born in 1943 in Media, Pennsylvania, a small town a few miles west of Philadelphia, and grew up in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, where he graduated from high school. He received a BS in biology from Ursinus College in 1965 and an MS in biological sciences from the University of Delaware in 1967. Immediately after graduation he began his career with the Academy of Natural Sciences, and was the first employee at the then-new Estuarine Research Center on the Patuxent River in Maryland, now the Patuxent Environmental & Aquatic Research Laboratory.

George was attracted to aquatic environments early on. He began to fish in freshwater with his father at the age of 4, and in saltwater when he was 6 years old. He also collected reptiles and amphibians, and kept them on the family porch, much to the dismay of his mother, who was deathly afraid of snakes. As he grew older, summer vacations were spent fishing, digging clams, and crabbing. It is easy to see why he always viewed his job as still being on vacation, because his research focused on clam, oyster, and blue crab populations. When he began his career in 1967, he expected to stay with the Academy of Natural Sciences for 3 years and then get a “real” job, but the research was so enjoyable and the time went by so fast that he never left. In 2004, the Academy transferred the Estuarine Research Center to Morgan State University, where George served on the research faculty, continuing his work on oyster and blue crab populations until his passing.

When he was not working on shellfish, George was probably working on wildfowl carvings—a passion and hobby that he pursued for more than 40 years. His attention to detail brought his birds to life. He also tinkered with small lapel pins, both birds and feathers, many of which made their way to student-supporting auctions at the annual NSA meetings. Those carvings and pins are now cherished by their owners. George was also an avid gardener and winemaker.

ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

George’s life work was diverse, but many of his greatest scientific accomplishments focused on the long-term population monitoring of 2 key resources—blue crab and eastern oyster populations—in the Chesapeake Bay. Although he was no stranger

to basic research, George always kept in mind the many problems that people cared about, be they from the public, resource management agencies, or industry. Studies and surveys conducted by George and his coworkers at the Estuarine Research Center played a major role in formulating state regulations involving the commercial oyster and blue crab fisheries. His earliest work sought to identify problems and solutions associated with the effects of discharges of cooling waters from power-generating stations on populations of oysters and blue crabs. From these initial investigations, George developed long-term environmental monitoring programs in the best spirit of third-party objectivity. In doing so, he embraced the celebrated environmental assessment strategy that had been molded by the esteemed Dr. Ruth Patrick, who was responsible for recruiting George to the Academy in 1967.

Today, tremendous value is placed on long-term data sets that are essential to tease apart the complex interactions between watershed change, climate change, and natural resource conditions. However, this was not always the case, and long-term data sets such as those generated by George are still rare and difficult to sustain. As examples, George's monitoring included a more than 40-year study of the fitness of blue crab populations in the Chesapeake Bay, and a more than 30-year study to quantify radionuclide accumulation by oysters placed in the discharge of the Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant.

Throughout his career, George also was at the forefront of addressing challenges faced by the shellfish industry, such as studying the interactions of environmental conditions and disease prevalence—primarily Dermo. He authored more than 150 publications and scientific reports. His attention to relevant applied issues that bridge the scientific, management, and industry sectors parallels that of the NSA, which is rich in cross-fertilization among these different sectors. Part of George's success in science can be attributed to his flexibility and adaptability—demonstrated, for example, by his willingness to embrace change and work to build new programs when the Estuarine Research Center shifted to Morgan State University.

A LIFE OF SERVICE

George served the NSA for decades, generously and with little fanfare. Although most of us perform service to professional societies in stints, George served the NSA for more than 30 years, and he was a continuous member for 45 years. He first joined the society in 1968, and his first annual meeting was in 1973 in New Orleans, where he also gave his first scientific presentation. From 1979 to 2013, George did not miss a single annual meeting.

George was appointed Member-at-Large of the Executive Committee in 1981, and in 1984 he was also appointed Chair of the Audit–Budget–Finance (ABF) Committee by President Ed Cake—a position that he held continuously (except during his term as president). During his tenure as ABF chairperson, George advised more than 20 different presidents and at least 10 treasurers. His 29 years as chair of ABF attests to how much he was respected and trusted with tending to the financial well-being of the NSA. His continuous oversight of financial matters was a stabilizing force that helped to bridge the many learning curves of new treasurers, as well as some severe financial speed bumps along the way. George helped to prepare about 30 annual NSA budgets, gingerly and tactfully helping to keep the society within its means while tending to a gradual increase in its many functions and products. Without question, the NSA owes its current financial stability in large part to George's insight and foresight.

George was also a distinguished president of the NSA, which was new territory for him because he preferred to stay behind the scenes. He served as president-elect, president (1998 to 1999) and past president. In 2003, George was bestowed with the society's highest award—the Honored Life Member Award (see *Journal of Shellfish Research* 27:249–250). Suffice it to say that George's dedication to the NSA, combined with his gentle demeanor and steadfast work ethic, has served as an example for generations.

In late 2013, the George R. Abbe Student Research Grant was created as a tribute to George and his long-standing commitment to students. This annual award supports student research in the areas of crustacean biology and fisheries management, which, as noted earlier, were 2 of George's lifelong passions. George was always a staunch supporter of students—from grammar school to graduate school. When the Estuarine Research Center transitioned to Morgan State University, George immediately saw this as an opportunity to engage an underserved student population. Along the way, he enthusiastically mentored many budding scientists and managers. His many interns are testament to his love of the environment, its challenges, and his work to overcome these challenges.

George Abbe was a bright flame, a trusted friend, advisor, and mentor to many. Quiet, unassuming, contemplative, and reserved, it was easy to take George for granted, and his contributions should not be underestimated. For those of us who were lucky enough to work with him and get to know him and Linda on a personal level, his passing is a deep loss. He was a confidant and trusted advisor to many. Whether as ABF chair for the NSA, professional colleague, or as a friend, George was like bedrock, never in doubt. His warm and engaging personality—and his smile—lit up a room. He was a voice of reason in the storm, a great source of entertaining yarns, and, above all, a good friend. We collectively salute you George R. Abbe, with a tear in our eye but a glass raised high!

Danielle Kreeger, Sandra E. Shumway, and J Hixson



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