



**Honored Life Member  
Susan E. Ford  
March 28, 2012**

Susan Ford began her career in shellfish biology in 1966 as a laboratory technician in the Department of Oyster Culture at Rutgers University under the direction of shellfish pioneer Harold H. Haskin. At the time 'Doc' Haskin, as he was known, was reluctant to hire a woman because he was not convinced that a woman could work on boats sampling oysters. Susan argued that she had just spent the past year sailing her 13-foot sail boat around Delaware Bay so a 40-foot motor boat would be well within her capabilities. She quickly proved her worth and became a valuable asset to Doc, the Lab and the oyster industry. It was Doc Haskin's excellent working relationships with scientists, regulators, industry, conservationists, and the public at large that provided a model for Susan to develop similar working relationships throughout a successful and productive career that continues to this day. On March 28, 2012, the National Shellfisheries Association formally recognized these contributions and made Susan an Honored Life Member.

Born in Minnesota, Susan moved several times as she completed her early education in New York, Washington DC, Paris, and Copenhagen. She spent her high school years in Williamsburg, Virginia, where she resides today. Her academic prowess in high school earned her an Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Scholarship to start her college career at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, but she soon found herself back on the East Coast of the US working as a laboratory technician for Doc Haskin. Doc's passion for using research to guide management of natural resources clearly influenced Susan as she began research on breeding oysters for resistance to MSX disease. Doc convinced Susan to present their findings at the NSA Annual Meeting in 1970 where she ultimately received the Thurlow C. Nelson Award for best student presentation of "MSX" - 10 Years in the Lower Delaware

Bay'. Susan was the fifth recipient of that award and the first woman to receive the honor at a time when few women were working in the field of science, let alone as shellfish biologists. A few years later, Susan completed her undergraduate education with a BA in Zoology from Rutgers University, and in 1978, she and Doc Haskin published the seminal paper "Development of resistance to *Minchinia nelsoni* (MSX) mortality in laboratory-reared and native oyster stocks in Delaware Bay" (Haskin and Ford, 1979).

In these early years Susan worked alongside oystermen in the small fishing village of Bivalve, New Jersey – the center of the Delaware Bay oyster industry. The Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory had not yet been constructed, so their laboratory consisted of a series of rooms in the former shipping sheds alongside the docks of the oyster industry. Shellfish breeding and field trials occurred at the Oyster Research Laboratory (now the Cape Shore Laboratory) in the lower portion of the Bay along the Cape May peninsula. Many days were spent on oyster fishing vessels, the laboratory research vessels, at the Cape Shore Lab culling oyster stocks for mortality, scraping spat to prevent contamination of lines, or in the lab processing samples for histopathology. It was here that Susan honed her skills and interests as a shellfish biologist and pathologist.

In 1978 she left southern New Jersey in pursuit of a doctorate in zoology from Duke University in North Carolina. There she became a Teaching Assistant and was awarded a Cocos Foundation Fellowship to help complete her dissertation on "Physiological aspects of size, age, and growth rate in the gastropod *Helisoma duryi*". She returned to the Department of Oyster Culture at Rutgers as an Adjunct Instructor, became an Assistant Professor the following year, an Associate Professor in 1990, and a full Professor in 1997. Susan retired from the University in 2003, but maintained an office and an active research program at the Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory until moving back to Williamsburg in 2013 where she continues to collaborate with many colleagues on manuscripts, reports, student committees, and funded research.

Since Susan made that first presentation at the 1970 NSA meeting, her contributions to the field have grown steadily without compromise of quality or integrity or impact. For those of you that measure productivity quantitatively, she has more than 125 peer-reviewed publications with several in preparation or submitted at this moment. She has made and co-authored hundreds of presentations and a host of technical reports. Her h-index is 35 indicating she has 35 publications with at least 35 citations – overall, her papers have been cited nearly 4,500 time by others. These vast contributions span the fields of shellfish biology, ecology, physiology, pathology, aquaculture and fisheries.

Susan's contributions to the field are well recognized by her peers where she enjoys the highest level of respect. She has been appointed to the editorial board of several journals (*Journal of Shellfish Research*, *Journal of Invertebrate Pathology*, and *Diseases of Aquatic Organisms*), and serves on the board of directors for BioOne. She has always been extremely generous with her time whenever NSA, the shellfish community, students, the public, or government have asked for her expertise. She spent six years on the Board of Trustees of the New Jersey Nature Conservancy, provided testimony to the US Congress on oyster diseases twice, has been on numerous scientific panels, working groups (including

14 years as the only US representative on the ICES Working Group on Pathology and Diseases of Marine Organisms), and has been an invited lecturer in Mexico, China, Italy, France, Canada and South Korea. She served on the National Academy of Sciences Committee on Introduction of Non-Native Oysters in Chesapeake Bay. In 2004, Susan was the first woman to receive the David H. Wallace Award in recognition of her service to bridge the communication gaps between the academic, governmental and public sectors of society.

Within NSA, Susan has always preferred to work behind the scenes, turning down requests to run for office, but never falling short on service in a variety of appointments and volunteer posts including Newsletter Editor, Awards Committee Chair, Student Presentation Judge, session chair/moderator/organizer, local site conference committee, NSA Historian, and of course co-Chair of the Publications committee for over a decade where she led the effort to get JSR online via BioOne and the Biodiversity Heritage Library – a feat that not only increased access, but also increased revenue to offset publication costs. As Historian, Susan organized and moderated the Centennial Roundtable which is available on the NSA website as a transcript or as a CD recording. She also authored a chapter on the contributions of women to NSA in the “Taming of the Oyster” which documents the history of NSA through 2004.

In summary, Susan Ford exemplifies the kind of professional that all NSA members should seek to become. As an academic she has sought solutions for difficult problems, both basic and applied. As an NSA member she has provided assistance and leadership without expectation of reward or recognition.

David Bushek, Associate Professor of Marine and Coastal Sciences, and Director, Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory, Rutgers University  
Ryan Carnegie, Research Associate Professor of Marine Science, Virginia Institute of Marine Science  
Gef Flimlin, Professor/Marine Extension Agent, Rutgers Cooperative Extension

## **References:**

Haskin, H.H. and S.E. Ford. 1979. Development of resistance to *Minchinia nelsoni* (MSX) mortality in laboratory-reared and native oyster stocks in Delaware Bay. Mar. Fish. Rev. 41(1-2):54-63.