

Honored Life Member George R. Abbe

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**Honored Life Member
George R. Abbe**

George R. Abbe was born in 1943 in Media, Pennsylvania, a small town a few miles west of Philadelphia, but grew up in Swarthmore, PA where he graduated from high school. He received a B.S. in biology from Ursinus College in 1965 and a M. Sc. 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 new Estuarine Research Center on the Patuxent River in Maryland.

George was attracted to aquatic environments early on. He began to fish in fresh water, with help from his father, at the age of four and in salt water when he was six. 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. Thus it is easy to see why, after having spent 40 years working with clam, oyster and blue crab populations, he still thinks he is on vacation. When he began his career in 1967, he expected to stay with the Academy of Natural Sciences for three 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 gave the Estuarine Research Center to Morgan State University, where George serves as part of the research faculty and continues his work on oyster and blue crab populations.

When he is not working on shellfish, George is probably working on his latest wildfowl carving as he has done for more than 35 years. His attention to detail brings his birds to life. He also does small lapel pins, both birds and feathers, many of which have made their way to the auctions at the annual NSA meetings. He is an avid gardener and winemaker, although he no longer has the vineyard.

In 2003, George was selected to become an Honored Life Member of the National Shellfisheries Association. Having joined NSA in 1968, his first annual meeting was in 1973 in New Orleans where he also gave his first presentation. Since 1979, George has not missed a single annual meeting. Few other members can boast continuous membership and meeting attendance for any society for so long. But it is his continued service to NSA and work in the field of shellfisheries for which he receives this honor.

George's professional service to NSA began in 1981, when he was appointed Member-at-Large of the Executive Committee to replace another Member-at-Large who had been elected to a higher position. In 1984 George was appointed Chair of the Audit-Budget-Finance Committee by President Ed Cake—a position that he has held ever since (except during his term as President). During his tenure as ABF Chairperson, George has advised twenty different Presidents and at least nine Treasurers. His 24 years as ABF Chair attests to how much he is respected and trusted with tending to the financial well-being of the Association. He has

attended 25 annual Executive Committee meetings and helped prepare almost as many NSA budgets. He also served as President Elect, President (1998–1999) and Past President, which was a coup for NSA because he much prefers working behind the scenes. Whereas many of us perform service to NSA in stints, George has served continuously. His dedication and service to the Association, gentle demeanor and steadfast work ethic set an example for all.

George's honest and steadfast service ethic apply equally to his scientific research and technical accomplishments. He is no stranger to basic research, but has always directed his primary efforts toward problems that people cared about, be they from the public, resource management agencies, or industry. The studies and surveys conducted by George and his co-workers at the Estuarine Research Center have played a major role in formulations of state regulations involving the commercial oyster and blue crab fisheries and their industries. His earliest work sought to identify problems and solutions associated with the effects of cooling water discharges from power generating stations on populations of oysters and blue crabs. From these initial investigations, George has developed classic long-term environmental monitoring programs in the best spirit of third-party objectivity, following in the celebrated environmental assessment mold of Ruth Patrick, who was responsible for bringing him to the Academy in 1967. For example, George's monitoring includes a 40-year study of the fitness of blue crab populations in Chesapeake Bay, and a 30-year study to quantify radionuclide accumulation by oysters placed in the discharge of the Calvert Cliffs (MD) Nuclear Power Plant. Long-term data sets like these are uncommon and they become increasingly valuable as we attempt to tease apart the multiple factors associated with local and regional stressor-response relationships.

Throughout his career, George has helped address challenges faced by the shellfish industry, such as studying the interactions of environmental conditions and disease prevalence (dermo). George has authored more than 150 publications and scientific reports. His attention to relevant applied issues between the scientific, management and industry sectors parallels that of NSA, which is rich in cross-fertilization among these different sectors.

Part of George's success can be attributed to his flexibility and adaptability. When the Estuarine Research Center was separated from the Academy of Natural Sciences in 2004, George adapted by helping to build new programs at the Center under the institutional lead of Morgan State University. George has always loved working with students, and this opened up new avenues for teaching the next generation of scientists from an under-represented population.

George Abbe is truthful, trustworthy, conscientious, and supportive. I had the honor of working with George during my years of service to NSA where he served as a trusted advisor, as I'm sure he has done for every president and treasurer since 1984. He always offered prompt and unequivocal support no matter what challenges I faced, something I will never forget. NSA owes him a great debt of gratitude.

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