



**IN MEMORIAM  
RUTH DIXON TURNER  
1914-2000**

Ruth Turner was born in Melrose, Massachusetts December 7, 1914. She attended Bridgewater State College, MA and graduated with a B.S. in 1936. She became a school teacher, teaching in both Bondville, Vermont and North Reading, Massachusetts before accepting the appointment of Assistant Director of Education at the New England Museum of Natural History (now the Boston Museum of Science). Ruth subsequently became Assistant Curator of Birds at the Museum, before moving to Vassar College as an Instructor in the Biology Department. During this same period she completed a M.A. at Cornell. By this time Ruth was an accomplished ornithologist, an interest that she maintained throughout her life. Indeed, it was her interest in birds that first lead her to the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard. While serving as a volunteer in the Ornithology Department she met William J. Clench, Curator of Mollusks. Clench introduced Ruth to Dr. William Clapp, a pioneer in the study of marine wood borers, and in 1944 she moved to the William F. Clapp Laboratories in Duxbury, Massachusetts. It was here that her career as a malacologist became firmly established. She returned to Harvard University two years later to work with Clench.

Harvard remained her scientific home and a source of great pride to her throughout her career. One of her early field trips with Clench was to Cuba in 1949 to examine local terrestrial and marine mollusks. She received her Ph.D. from Radcliffe College, Harvard University in 1954. Her dissertation on the Teredinidae remains a standard work to this day. From 1954 through 1975 she served as Research Associate in the Department of Mollusks at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Alexander Agassiz Fellow in Zoology and Oceanography, and Lecturer in Biology at Harvard. In 1976 she became Professor of Biology, Curator in Malacology at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, and joint editor of the scientific journal *Johnsonia*. Ruth received honorary D.Sc. degrees from New England College and Plymouth State College of the University of New Hampshire, and held honorary appointments at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, the Gray Museum at the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole, Leigh University, CSIRO and the University of New South Wales in Australia, the University of Puerto Rico, and as an FAO Fellow in India. Ruth was honored by the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution as a "Women Pioneer in Oceanography." On a lighter but no less important note, Ruth was named "Diver of the Year" by the Boston Sea Rovers, an educational society of which she was a very proud member. Ruth served terms as President of both the American Malacological Union and the Boston Malacological Club. She was a Honorary Life Member of the National Shellfisheries Association.

Ruth was a pioneer in the field of marine biodeterioration research, and enjoyed a long term relationship with the Office of Naval Research. This, combined with her work in invertebrate and larval ecology, took her to many corners of the globe including France, Belgium, Netherlands, England, Germany, Denmark, Puerto Rico, India, Pakistan, many locations in Australasia, South America, and the former Soviet Union. Although a leading researcher, she enjoyed teaching at all levels from special courses for public school teachers, to undergraduate and graduate teaching, to her gentle persuasion of fellow researchers to look at a problem or a data set in another light. Ruth's work also took her on many oceanographic cruises and to the depths of the ocean. On August 13, 1971, she became the first woman to dive in the deep submergence research vehicle ALVIN. This was the first of many dives and a deep sea career that included long term biodeterioration and species diversity work in the deep ocean (it was Ruth who explained why so little wood remained on the Titanic when it was found deep in the North Atlantic Ocean), and participation in multi-investigator cruises to the Galapagos Rift system.



Despite a career filled with discovery, innovation, and firsts, the most memorable component of Ruth's character that remains with the majority of people who met her is her warmth and friendliness, and her desire to show the excitement of science to all. Her love of science was effusive. She had a unique ability to share her science with audiences of all ages and skill levels. She was equally a superb teacher, illustrator, and practical scientist from fine work with the electron microscope to dissections of material from the field. Ruth taught and mentored many scientists at many levels, unselfishly giving of her time and energy to advance their careers. I consider myself fortunate to have enjoyed such direction from Ruth. Ruth shared much of her science through her publications, over 100 in all. Ruth worked actively until well after her 80th birthday. She left unfinished two major works, a monograph on her studies of deep sea borers and a comprehensive illustrated catalog of the pholads. Her colleagues have committed to finish these.

Throughout her career Ruth made unique contributions in malacology and deep sea biology. She was an internationally respected educator and researcher, an ambassador for marine and biodeterioration studies, and an outstanding role model for women in science. Ruth is survived by her sisters Winifred Garrity and Lina MacNeil. Ruth was predeceased by her brothers Henry and Arthur, and her sisters Jessie, Mary, and Frances. Ruth never married, but had a large extended family of colleagues and students. She will be sadly missed.

Roger Mann  
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