



Memories

MARINE MAMMAL SCIENCE, 27(3): 665–670 (July 2011)
© 2011 by the Society for Marine Mammalogy
DOI: 10.1111/j.1748-7692.2011.00492.x



PETER JOHANNES HENDRIKUS VAN BREE
1927–2011

Honorary Member of the Society for Marine Mammalogy

The Dutch marine mammal biologist Dr. Peter J. H. van Bree died peacefully at the age of 83 on 24 February 2011. People around Peter will remember him as a passionate scientist and conservationist. He was respected and well liked by his friends and colleagues and loved by his family for his remarkable, generous and open personality. In his professional career, Peter was an exceptionally able mammal curator at the Zoological Museum of Amsterdam (ZMA), taking great care to conserve the collection in the most perfect and well-documented condition possible. Through his extensive international network, he greatly expanded the marine mammal collection that was initiated by Max Weber but had been poorly housed during and after the

Second World War. He rebuilt the collection with material collected by him and his many colleagues and also exchanged specimens with other museums to make it of worldwide importance with a unique diversity of species. Because he was always ready to help people who needed to identify material or wanted to ask more about the collection, many were willing to help him in obtaining additional museum material. He appreciated all contributions whether skeletons, skulls, or only teeth and stray bones, because "every small part of an animal is physical proof of its existence." The preparation of big skeletons was a smelly and laborious job, but Peter's determination resulted in a beautiful collection, which has recently become part of The Netherlands Centre for Biodiversity Naturalis in Leiden. Although Peter retired in 1992, he was not replaced as a consequence of the economizing policy of the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and was asked by the museum director to continue his work at the ZMA as an honorary collaborator for several more years; he accepted and continued taking care of the collection and inspiring and offering valuable help to many students. His literature collection was amazingly extensive. Brief references uttered by students about any mammal research subject invariably resulted in them walking out of his office with their arms full of reprints and books. His devotion to the conservation of mammals, and in particular, marine mammals played a key role in the advancement of many conservation policies and initiatives. He supported a large number of conservation projects on the ground and inspired many young individuals to follow the path of conservation.

Peter was born in Tebing Tinggi, northeast Sumatra, Indonesia, on 17 September 1927, the son of Berend van Bree and Johanna Wilhelmina Charlotte van Bree-Meyer. Peter spent his early youth until the age of 7 in Indonesia, where, as he said, he had the jungle as his backyard, which definitely laid the roots for a profound admiration for the great diversity of nature. When Peter started his study of biology at the UvA, his interest in systematics was obvious, and so he promptly became an honorary assistant in herpetology at the ZMA. He obtained his B.Sc. in biology in 1955 and his M.Sc. in 1958 at the UvA, his main subjects being zoological taxonomy, animal physiology, parasitology, and the history of zoology. In 1959, he first entered the field of mammalogy and became chief assistant at the ZMA and 1 yr later Curator of Mammals. While his major interest lay with cetaceans and pinnipeds, he also published on and was active in conservation of several species of terrestrial Carnivora and Przewalski horses.

Peter's early interest in marine mammals dates back to the age of 20 when he described his observations of whales made onboard a fish trawler in the North Sea (van Bree 1948). He began publishing more systematically on marine mammals in 1963 with the description of a fin whale, *Balaenoptera physalus*, stranded on the Dutch coast (van Bree and van der Feen 1963) and coauthored his final publication in 2007, on the cranial description and genetic identity of the holotype specimen of *Tursiops aduncus* (Perrin *et al.* 2007). He published more than 200 articles in mammalogy in about 60 yr, of which 150 were about marine mammals, 96 of these on cetaceans. His doctoral thesis consisted of 12 published articles on the systematics of cetaceans, of which four dealt with the taxonomic status of *Delphinus* spp. (van Bree 1971a, b, 1973, van Bree and Purves 1972). He also contributed to attempts to resolve the

systematic position of this genus, through his descriptions of *Delphinus tropicalis* (van Bree 1971c, van Bree and Gallagher 1978), now *D. capensis tropicalis* (Jefferson and Van Waerebeek, 2002), and coauthored a revision of the spotted dolphins in the genus *Stenella* (Perrin *et al.* 1987). Many of these contributions have had a lasting impact thanks to his attention to detail, for example, the influential paper (van Bree 1971d) in which he discussed the nomenclature of the genus *Globicephala* and key morphological differences by which to distinguish short-finned from long-finned pilot whales.

He contributed 53 publications on pinnipeds, the first in 1961 on the gray seal, *Halichoerus grypus* (van Bree 1961). Most of his pinniped articles dated from the late eighties onwards; his last was in 2005, an updated catalog of the remains of Pinnipedia in the collection of the ZMA. For 40 yr, he maintained a close collaboration with the Seal Rehabilitation and Research Centre (SRRC) at Pieterburen, The Netherlands. The collaboration worked both ways, as the SRRC provided museum material and Peter, as their advisor, helped on many issues, including viral epidemics, Mediterranean monk seals, *Monachus monachus*, Baikal seals, *Pusa sibirica*, several species of stranded whales, and dolphins. Together with the SRRC, he was actively involved in the conservation of the monk seals in Mauritania, Turkey, and Greece. Lenie and Pieter 't Hart from the SRRC remember a very bad ice storm that hit Holland in the mid-80s that cut off and paralyzed with inaccessible and slippery roads the whole northern part of the country where the SRRC is situated. Nevertheless, at 1100 sharp as per their appointment, Peter entered the Centre after a long drive across the country, as "an appointment is an appointment and needs to be kept." About 20 yr later, Peter actively guided Pieter't Hart as one of his last students towards a successful Ph.D. on the history of the seal hunt in the Netherlands.

In 1978, he published a note on the differences between monk seals from the Atlantic and the western Mediterranean and in 2002, his last notes on the description and type material of the Hawaiian monk seal, *Monachus schauinslandi*. Peter followed monk seal conservation work from the first international conference organized in Rhodes in 1978 and was actively involved between 1996 and 2007 in Turkey, where he visited Foça every summer and advised the Underwater Research Society-Mediterranean Seal Research Group (SAD-AFAG). He also guided one of his last students there, with whom he published on *M. monachus* (Kompanje *et al.* 2000). With his student Harun Güçlüsoy, he explored all the ancient Hellenistic and Roman ruins along the Turkish coasts while searching museums and ancient cities for monk seal and marine mammal mosaics. In addition to his advisory help in the monk seal projects through SAD-AFAG, for which he was nominated honorary member, he advocated monk seal conservation at the European level and obtained funds from several sources to support these projects. Finally, he donated his entire English marine mammal library to SAD-AFAG. This library is quite important because Peter inherited many books and reprints from older colleagues and friends. So, the collection spans the activities of at least three generations of marine mammal biologists.

Peter would look a prospective doctoral student sternly in the eye to size up her or his capacities, making his decision after a grueling interview. When he accepted

anyone, he would maintain unwavering faith in her or his research project. In 1985, for instance, Peter allowed Koen Van Waerebeek to roam in the Southern Hemisphere for years to collect material and study the population biology of the dusky dolphin. He arranged to largely exempt Koen from the UvA's routine formalities and control mechanisms. Instead, Peter offered regular feedback (by airmail) on progress reports and sent encouragements against hardships. After Koen's public dissertation defence, Peter, with his characteristic attention to fine traditions, presented an original copy of True's 1889 *A Review of the Family Delphinidae* as if it were routine rather than the most perfect and generous gift. Even after his retirement, Peter helped more Ph.D. students, including Daniëlle Krebs, advocating her Bornean freshwater dolphin project and emphasizing the importance of her entering candidacy.

At least six species have been named after Peter, including a copepod *Collocheres breei* (Stock 1966), a Surinam catfish *Corydoras breei* (Isbrücker and Nijssen 1992), a Javanese fossil porcupine *Hystrix vanbreei* (van Weers 1992), a Southeast Asian cicad *Orientalpsaltria vanbreei* (Duffels and Zaidi 1999), and an African fruitbat, *Lissonycteris angolensis petraea* (Bergmans 1997), indicating the deep appreciation by his diverse network of fellow museum colleagues. A short-rostrum odontocete from the middle Miocene of the eastern Netherlands was named *Vanbreenia trigonia* (Bianucci and Landini 2002) for his distinguished research activity and outstanding contribution to the knowledge of extant and fossil marine mammals.

During his career at the ZMA, Peter performed fieldwork in many parts of the world: Gabon, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Morocco, Indonesia, Malaysia, Surinam, Venezuela, and Curaçao. His museum visits brought him to Belgium, France, Spain, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Germany, Japan, the United States, Australia, and Indonesia. In recent years, he often emphasized how much he had enjoyed the many things he had seen around the world thanks to his job, and how much he enjoyed his many friendships all over the globe and those close at home. His colleagues abroad remember him for his passionate interest in all things wild and natural. Bill Perrin vividly remembers the day when he rolled up his pant legs and waded into California tide pools to observe the octopi and starfish there.

After his retirement in 1992, he continued traveling, especially in the countries around the Mediterranean because of his deep interest in Greek and Roman art. During these trips, Peter took photographs with much enthusiasm. One of the very few pictures where Peter was himself portrayed would characterize him best, a real gentleman in a fine (tropical) suit among his fellow travelers all wearing shorts.

At the same time, Peter continued his work as a board member of several societies and foundations concerned with nature conservation. He played an important role in the nature conservation movement in The Netherlands and was chairman of The Netherlands Committee of the IUCN (NC-IUCN) between 1982 and 1985. He was an active member of the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of the IUCN and the SSC Steering Committee until 1994. He was also secretary of the Van Tienhoven Foundation from 1978 to 1983 and treasurer from 1983 to 1997 and secretary of The Netherlands Commission for International Nature Conservation from 1978 to 1997, and through both functions he did much to support the NC-IUCN. He was a member of the Boards of Editors of the *Zeitschrift für Säugetierkunde* and *Beaufortia* for more

than 30 yr. From its first meeting in 1975 until the 100th meeting in 1996, he was a very active member of the Advisory Committee on Threatened Exotic Animal and Plant Species, The Netherlands Scientific Authority for CITES. Moreover, he played a key role in the accession of The Netherlands to CITES. His contribution was vital for the increasing role of scientific advice as the basis of nature conservation policies in The Hague and Brussels. As scientific advisor he participated twice as part of the Dutch delegation in the International Whaling Commission (Canberra and Tokyo) and was chair of the Animals Committee of CITES in Bern.

For his contributions to science and his conservation work, Peter received several honors, including “Officer in the Order of Oranje-Nassau” and “Officer in the Order of the Golden Ark,” which he received from H.R.H. Prince Bernhard of The Netherlands. In 1996, he became an Honorary Member of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Säugetierkunde and in 2002, an Honorary Member of the Society for Marine Mammalogy. He participated in many of the biennial conferences organized by the Society. However, his Dutch compound name caused some problems; first he was listed in the Society directory under V. When he objected to that, he was dropped entirely; only later did he re-emerge under B.

Peter was much liked by his students; he kept guiding them long after his retirement. He provided extensive help with literature, advice and useful contacts. He also appreciated students’ company outside the confines of the museum, whether for traveling, fine dining, or going to see some wildlife movie at the cinema, and he treated them as equal discussion partners and friends. He was a great host, and marine mammalogists from around the globe enjoyed his hospitality at his Amsterdam flat (stocked with another amazing library) and were entertained with challenging conversations on innumerable subjects, ranging from the scholarly, philosophical, literature, art, and history to witty gossip. While he would endlessly poke fun at the more relaxed Latin-influenced idiosyncracies of Belgian society compared to the stiff Calvinist Dutch, Peter was at heart an authentic *bon vivant* himself. He spoke and wrote perfect French (as well as German and English) and, if pressured, would admit he thoroughly enjoyed the suave epicurean ambiance in Belgium and France, where he loved to take his holidays.

Peter will be remembered for his museum labors and intellectual skills, good sense of humor, kindness, generosity, his appreciation of the natural world, and enthusiasm for conservation. These have inspired his family, friends, colleagues, and students. Peter was a true biologist, as he understood and accepted fully his own aging process and never uttered any complaints about his own physical condition. Instead he was thankful for the “active and pleasant life” (his own words) that he lived for 83 yr. He is survived by his nephew Marc L. van Bree.

LITERATURE CITED

- Jefferson, T. A., and K. van Waerebeek. 2002. The taxonomic status of the nominal dolphin species *Delphinus tropicalis* van Bree, 1971. *Marine Mammal Science* 18:787–818.
- Kompanje, E. J. O., H. Güçlüsoy and P. J. H. van Bree. 2000. Osteoporosis in an adult female monk seal *Monachus monachus* from Çesme, Turkey. *The Monachus Guardian* 3:1–2.

- Perrin, W. F., E. D. Mitchell, J. G. Mead, D. K. Caldwell, M. C. Caldwell, P. J. H. van Bree and W. H. Dawbin. 1987. Revision of the spotted dolphins, *Stenella* spp. *Marine Mammal Science* 3:99–170.
- Perrin, W. F., K. M. Robertson, P. J. H. van Bree and J. G. Mead. 2007. Cranial description and genetic identity of the holotype specimen of *Tursiops aduncus* (Ehrenberg, 1832). *Marine Mammal Science* 23:343–357.
- van Bree, P. J. H. 1948. De Hille. *Amoeba* 24:27–28.
- van Bree, P. J. H. 1961. On the remains of some Carnivora found in a prehistoric site at Vlaardingen, the Netherlands. *Beaufortia* 8:109–118.
- van Bree, P. J. H. 1971a. On two skulls of *Delphinus dussumieri* Blanford, 1891 (notes on Cetacea, Delphinoidea I). *Beaufortia* 18:169–172.
- van Bree, P. J. H. 1971b. On the taxonomic status of *Delphinus pernettensis* de Blainville, 1817 (notes on Cetacea, Delphinoidea II). *Beaufortia* 19:21–25.
- van Bree, P. J. H. 1971c. *Delphinus tropicalis*, a new name for *Delphinus longirostris* G. Cuvier. *Mammalia* 35:345–346.
- van Bree, P. J. H. 1971d. On *Globicephala sieboldii* Gray, 1846, and other species of pilot whales. *Beaufortia* 249:79–87.
- van Bree, P. J. H. 1973. On the description and the taxonomic status of *Delphinus bolboellii* (Nilsson, 1847 (notes on Cetacea, Delphinoidea VI). *Beaufortia* 20:129–133.
- van Bree, P. J. H. 2002. Notes on the description and the type material of the Hawaiian Monk Seal or Laysan Seal, *Monachus schauinslandi* Matschie, 1905. *The Monachus Guardian* 5:1.
- van Bree, P. J. H. 2005. Updated catalogue of the remains of Pinnipedia (Mammalia) in the collection of the Zoological Museum Amsterdam. Volume 4. Pages 1–48. University of Amsterdam. Backhuys Publishers, Leiden, The Netherlands.
- van Bree, P. J. H., and M. D. Gallagher. 1978. On the taxonomic status of *Delphinus tropicalis* van Bree, 1971 (notes on Cetacea, Delphinoidea IX). *Beaufortia* 28:1–8.
- van Bree, P. J. H., and P. E. Purves. 1972. Remarks on the validity of *Delphinus bairdii* (Cetacea, Delphinidae). *Journal of Mammalogy* 53:372–374.
- van Bree, P. J. H., and P. J. van der Feen. 1963. Over de vinvis, welke op 14 november 1956 aanspoelde op het strand tussen Wijk aan Zee en IJmuiden. *Lutra* 5:8–13.

DANIËLE KREB,¹ Conservation Foundation for Rare Aquatic Species of Indonesia, PO Box 1105, Samarinda 75124, Kalimantan Timur, Indonesia; WILLIAM F. PERRIN, Southwest Fisheries Science Center, National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA, 3333 N. Torrey Pines Court, La Jolla, California, U.S.A.; PIETER'T HART, Seal Rehabilitation and Research Centre, Hoofdstraat 94-a, 9968 AG Pieterburen, The Netherlands; HARUN GÜÇLÜSOY, Dokuz Eylül University, Institute of Marine Sciences and Technology, Bakü Blvd. 100, 35340, Inciralti, Izmir, Turkey; KOEN VAN WAEREBEEK, CEPEC-Museo de Delfines, Lima 20, Peru.

¹This contribution represents the thoughts and efforts of Peter's family, many friends, colleagues, and students. Special thanks to Wim Bergmans for sharing his carefully and orderly prepared list of Peter's publications of which only a minor but relevant selection is noted here.