



Obituary: Robert Eugene Ruff (1947–2017)

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Robert Eugene Ruff (Fig. 1A) was born on 13 April 1947 in Allendale, Michigan, USA, and died on 26 November 2017 at his home in Puyallup, Washington, at the age of 70. Shortly after his birth, his family moved to the State of Washington where he lived for much of his life. He graduated from Clover Park High School, Tacoma, WA, in 1965 and subsequently attended the University of Washington, where he graduated with a B.S. in Biological Oceanography in 1971. While a student at the University of Washington, he married his high school sweetheart, Lorraine Marie Charlton on 17 July 1968.

After graduation, Dr. Andrew Carey employed Gene Ruff in his Benthic Ecology Laboratory at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon, where he worked for 13 years. Gene's role with Dr. Carey included management of the benthic laboratory, where he developed his expertise and lifelong interest in polychaete systematics. Gene also developed considerable expertise in directing field operations for Dr. Carey's benthic surveys offshore Oregon and the Alaskan Arctic.

In 1984, Gene was recruited to join the Benthic Ecology Group at Battelle Ocean Sciences in Duxbury, Massachusetts, to help process the extensive deep-sea invertebrate collections being collected as part of the U.S. Atlantic Continental Slope and Rise (ACSAR) program conducted for the U.S. Department of Interior. These collections were part of reconnaissance and monitoring surveys to assess the potential impact of oil and gas exploration in deep-water areas along the entire U.S. Atlantic coast from New England to South Carolina. As a senior polychaete taxonomist (Fig. 1B), Gene reported directly to Drs. James Blake and Nancy Maciolek. At Battelle, Gene was also recognized for his field expertise and led a field team in the Beaufort Sea, Alaska, as Chief Scientist. He also served as Watch Leader on deep-water ACSAR surveys off the Carolinas.

Gene was with Battelle from 1984–1989, after which he returned to the State of Washington as director of his own business, Ruff Systematics, in Puyallup, WA. Gene continued his association with Dr. Blake and served as a polychaete systematist on numerous projects. From about, 2007–2017, he was a part-time employee with the Washington State Department of Ecology, working remotely from his home office in Puyallup. In that capacity, he served as a taxonomist for the Marine Sediment Monitoring Team, identifying polychaetes for the Puget Sound Sediment Monitoring Program and developing voucher collections and worksheets to assist in identifications. He worked closely with Ms. Maggie Dutch and Ms. Kathy Welch, Ecology's lead taxonomist. Gene was extremely generous in sharing his knowledge of polychaete taxonomy with Kathy and other Ecology coworkers, and happiest when Kathy and others would come to his office to “play worms!”

Gene attended the International Polychaete conferences in Copenhagen, Denmark (1986), Long Beach, California (1989) and Angers, France (1991). He authored or co-authored five new species in the Polynoidae (2), Dorvilleidae (2), and Sabellidae (1) and described one new polynoid genus. He was careful and meticulous with his polychaete identifications. When requested, he provided detailed justification, including references, for the names being applied. When the specimens did not agree with any of the known taxa at the sites being surveyed, he would provide details and justification for provisional categories. He also provided careful and detailed reviews of papers that others had written.

A quiet and gentle person, Gene liked reading the classics, ice skating (until he broke his ankle), M&M candies, and both lunar and solar eclipses. He loved the Arctic and told stories of sleeping out in the field in

order to take water quality measurements overnight, armed only with a shotgun in case of an encounter with a polar bear (he never had to use it).



FIGURE 1. A, Gene Ruff in a cabin on the R/V *Cape Hatteras* offshore North Carolina, May 1984; B, Gene in his office-lab at Battelle in Duxbury, Massachusetts in September 1986.

Gene was pre-deceased by his parents, Robert F. and Louise G. (Lemmen) Ruff, his brother, William H. Ruff, and his wife of 47 years, Lorraine (Charlton) Ruff. He is survived by his son, David M. Ruff of Texas and a sister, Suzanne E. (Ruff) Kaulukukui of Hawaii.

Bibliography

Mr. Ruff was the author or co-author of more than 70 professional papers and technical reports on marine ecological studies, environmental issues, and polychaetes. A few relevant publications and reports are listed.

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