

## OBITUARY

# MALCOLM ROY CLARKE: MARINE BIOLOGIST AND FELLOW OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY

*Malcolm Roy Clarke – Marine biologist – Royal Society  
Fellow – Independent and optimistic thinker – Born 24  
October 1930, died 10 May 2013*



Malcolm Clarke (centre) with Dot and John Forsythe in Hakone, Japan, 1991.

Malcolm once said: ‘if the worst human experience would have happened to me, I would have always tried to convert it to some form of an enjoyment’. Harsh words, one may think, taking into consideration a variety of worst human experiences, but he certainly tried to remain optimistic in all circumstances. This practical approach and independence in choosing and following a particular direction in his work were his trademarks.

His personal life was rich and rewarding: he had a large family, marrying Dorothy Knight in 1958 and having four children. All were very close and supportive of one another, which is rare these days. His wife supported and helped him throughout all of his life. He travelled a lot: sailing on commercial and scientific vessels for long periods (periods unknown today—altogether close to seven years at sea), and as a visiting scholar to many institutions around the world (for example, three years’ involvement with the National

Institute of Atmospheric and Water Research in New Zealand). Each year he also attended meetings, conferences and semi-private gatherings in his three main fields of interest: cetaceans, cephalopods, and marine surveys and sampling. He also never really abandoned teaching and the transfer of knowledge in many forms: from his teaching post at a Secondary School in Scunthorpe (UK), through summer lectures and hands-on teaching of various holiday-makers, in the UK and overseas, to his own full-scale museum about whales, cephalopods and selected aspects of the large-scale understanding of marine life next to his house on the island of Pico, in the Azores. This museum, planned and built by the Clarke family, opened in 2003 and was still operational to 2013. There are plans to continue this important legacy elsewhere in the Azores.

Malcolm had a long and illustrious scientific career, starting with the biology of whales (particularly sperm whales): their anatomy and physiology, parasites (he discovered the largest parasite in the world), and gut contents. He said: ‘when I approached whale biology, initially from an armchair, I was astonished at the laziness of numerous biologists who studied whales but had very little to say about them; this was until I . . . faced a whale on the deck of a whaling vessel. The literal enormity of the ‘problem’ struck me like a sledgehammer. Nevertheless, I have tried’. And try he did, publishing a first physiological explanation of the role of the spermaceti oil of the sperm whale during diving and swimming. He did his PhD on the parasites of whales. To my knowledge, however, he never summarized his knowledge of whales in one large review. However, he did embark on this type of endeavour for the second of his scientific interests: cephalopods. He published such a review first in 1966, on oceanic squids and *Spirula*. Other summary works on cephalopods followed, topics ranging from beak identification, predator–prey relationships and statoliths. This was done both as an author and as an editor. Malcolm was elected FRS in 1981 and one of the best of his published efforts was ‘The role of cephalopods in the world’s oceans: an introduction’. (*Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, London, B* 351, 979–983). This work remains one of the best (if not *the* best) ecological summaries on cephalopods to this day. His editorial work was interspersed with numerous specific papers, about 150 of them in total. A third interest has also left a seminal legacy: the well-known rectangular mid-water trawl (RMT) net was the brainchild of Malcolm (together with some colleagues); the use of light inside various nets was another of his influential ideas.

He was one of the select few marine biologists who did not stop at PhD: he earned his DSc degree in 1979 during his period as a Senior Principal Scientific Officer, Marine Biological Association, between 1978 and 1987 (all his degrees are from Hull University, UK). He also invented the idea of the Cephalopod International Advisory Council (CIAC). At the time this idea took off (1981–1985) there were fewer than 50 permanently employed cephalopod scientists around the world, most of them in Japan. This idea worked beautifully—itsself no less a mystery than the biology of most rare cephalopods! The CIAC is now alive and well, having led to the organization (and publication) of no less

than ten of the most critical and comprehensive collections of papers on all aspects of cephalopod biology.

All of his life Malcolm was very skilful with his hands. Building a house? No problem. Doing some elaborate and complicated woodwork? No problem. New technical ideas on both household and scientific scale? No problem. He was perhaps the best and most accomplished handyman among all mammalogists and teuthologists.

In summary, what a life! A life fitting well Horace's famous hope: *Non omnis moriar*.

*Marek Lipinski*