

## Obituary for JENS BØDTKER RASMUSSEN (1947-2005)

The international herpetological community was shocked when the sad news dispersed that JENS BØDTKER RASMUSSEN had passed away on the 3rd of May of this year. The shock was the greater as we, his friends and colleagues, were completely unprepared for this terrible news: A severe illness had defeated JENS within only a few weeks and took him brutally away from his family as well as from his professional life as the herpetological curator of the Zoological University Museum of Copenhagen. His death finished abruptly a long-term and still flourishing period of successful work on the African snake fauna.

JENS BØDTKER RASMUSSEN was born on the 16th of April 1947 in Copenhagen where he spent also his entire school time. Still being a schoolboy, he visited regularly the Zoological Museum of his city, which at that time was still in its old building in Copenhagen's Krystalgade. He kept his close contacts to this museum also as a student and he received much support by the then head of the vertebrate department, Dr. F.W. BRAESTRUP. In these years – the museum had received a new and functional, modern building at Universitetsparken – our acquaintance and friendship began.

Nearly 40 years ago, in 1966, JENS and I had our first personal meetings. He came to the University of Kiel (Institut für Haustierkunde) where I was studying zoology at that time, and I visited him in Copenhagen, and guestrooms in our mutual institutions made these visits also for students financially tolerable. The guestrooms in the Copenhagen Museum, however, were particularly remarkable because during the day they were the working rooms and offices of the staff members, but each was also equipped with a sleeping accommodation. So I had the privi-



Photo: MOGENS ANDERSEN.

lege to spend the nights in the office of Dr. BRAESTRUP. At these occasions I received my first impressions of and experiences with the remarkable scientific herpetological collections of the Copenhagen Museum, and I used it often and regularly for my studies over all the years until present, ever since I worked at a zoological museum myself.

In 1977, after he had reached the degree of a licenciate (lic. scient.), JENS RASMUSSEN was employed at the museum as the herpetological curator and succeeding F.W. BRAESTRUP. His own research interests focussed early on snakes, in particular on African snakes. A fruitful time of research on African boigine snakes began, and JENS himself made his first experiences with African snake faunas in the field. His first trip led him, together with ARNE SCHIØTZ, then curator of Danmarks Akvarium



JENS RASMUSSEN during his first Africa-Symposium in Bonn, May 1984. Photo: ULRICH JOGER.



JENS RASMUSSEN on a field trip in Tanzania, examining a small boigine snake. Photo: MOGENS ANDERSEN.

at Charlottenlund near Copenhagen, to the Imatong Mountains in the southernmost Sudan, and he brought an important herpetological collection back to his museum. More collecting trips led him to Tanzania (mainly to the biogeographically important mountain ranges of Usambara and Uzungwa) and also to eastern DR Congo (at that time Zaire).

Already earlier, JENS started travelling activities to the major European collections, still as a student to Vienna, later to London, Liverpool, Paris, Brussels, Tervuren, and of course also to Bonn. A good personal relationship connected him with the famous GARTH UNDERWOOD in London who showed great interest in JENS' phylogenetic approach on boigine snakes using the snake eye retina cells. A special friendship linked him to MALCOLM LARGEN in Liverpool who had run the Addis Abeba museum for many years,

and they both published a voluminous, important monograph on the snakes of Ethiopia.

JENS proved to be an active participant of scientific meetings and congresses, visited the OGM's of the "Societas Europaea Herpetologica" (SEH) quite regularly, and took also part in the symposia on Afrotropical biodiversity at ZFMK in Bonn. Our contact and correspondence over these years was dense and intensive and exceeded a good relationship between friends very much.

In 1994, JENS submitted his doctoral thesis to the University of Copenhagen which dealt with "Studies on the taxonomy, phylogeny and zoogeography of the African rear-fanged tree snakes, genus *Dipsadoboaa* (Serpentes, Dipsadidae, Boiginae)". This cumulative thesis consisted of seven separate papers all of which were published in inter-

nationally reputed journals between 1985 and 1993. They were linked to each other by an extensive summary in Danish and English. This big work was supervised by Prof. BENT MUUS and co-reviewed by me. It had to be publicly defended and the University selected me as the so-called opponent. The lecture and defense took place on the 3rd of June, 1994 and was a brilliant and dignified academic event.

The following party, celebrated with JENS' family, friends and colleagues in the Zoological Museum, shed again light on an important facet of his personality which certainly must also be remembered here. He was a very social, communicative person, full of humour and fond of good eating and drinking. An important passion was beer. Visiting him or being visited by him was always a most agreeable and nice thing. I am glad that I may remember innumerable such meetings with him over the last four decades which made our friendship really personal and rich, including also our mutual families. I agree with the spontaneous reaction of one of our younger colleagues when he heard the sad news: Beer will never taste as before without JENS.

Two papers by JENS B. RASMUSSEN appeared posthumously (see the appendix below): one paper on the striped night adder (*Causus bilineatus*) and its relatives where the editor gave a first public note on JENS' death and a selected list of his papers on African snakes, and one on *Atractaspis aterrima*. For African ophidiology, a still most promising scientific career has abruptly ended. It was his great competence in his field of research that the German Herpetological Society (DGHT) asked him quite recently to join the editorial board of the present journal and to help increasing its scientific level, as "Salamandra" is currently being performed into an English-speaking scientific journal with international claim. He gladly agreed but was not allowed to see the appearance of the first issue. It is therefore more than appropriate that I am devoting this obituary to him in just this journal.

My sympathy is with his wife HEIDI AUNE and his daughter KIT. It was his wish that his ashes were strewed into the Baltic Sea.

### Acknowledgement

I wish to thank JENS' wife HEIDI AUNE and his assistant in the Copenhagen Museum, MOGENS ANDERSEN, for help during the preparation of this obituary.

### Appendix

A list of the papers published by JENS BØDTKER RASMUSSEN

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