

Marinus Boeseman, 1916-2006, a biography and a list of his publications

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In the early hours of 14 July 2006, Dr M. Boeseman, curator of fishes at the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie from 1947-1981, rather unexpectedly passed away at the age of 90. Considering his role as a staff member of the museum and the importance of his contributions to science, the publication of a short biographical note and a list of his publications seems an obligation towards his former colleagues and "his" museum, if not a duty for the first author as his successor.

Marinus Boeseman was born on June 22 in Enkhuizen, a small port at the Zuiderzee, which at that time had not been closed by a dike. His father, Jan Hendrik Boeseman, was Director Municipal Gasworks in Enkhuizen. After the untimely death of his father, Marinus, aged 11, his two elder sisters and his mother moved to Oegstgeest, a neighbour town of Leiden where he continued his primary and secondary education. Although he never lived in Enkhuizen again, Boeseman cherished the memory of his native town, as is apparent from his collection of paintings of its tower, the "Dromedaris".

Because of his talents as a draughtsman he contemplated a career in arts, but in 1935 Marinus decided to enter Leiden University to study biology.

As a student he published his first fish paper, on the behaviour of Bitterlings (*Rhodeus sericeus*), co-authored a.o. by Dr N. Tinbergen. Already before his "doctoraal examen" (masters degree) Boeseman started a research project at the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie, where he examined the fishes collected by Bürger and von Siebold in Japan, under the supervision of the curator of Fishes Dr F. Koumans. After obtaining his masters in November 1941, Boeseman continued the study of the Japanese fishes for his thesis with Prof. H. Boschma, director of the RMNH, as his supervisor. As Leiden University was closed, as a reaction of the German occupying forces to the students' protest against the anti-Jewish measures, the graduation ceremony would take place at the university of Amsterdam under the aegis of Prof. L.F. de Beaufort. Awaiting permission to publish his thesis in English, Boeseman on April 1, 1943 was appointed temporarily in the Entomological department of the RMNH, where he started research on Dermaptera. Unknown to his colleagues at the museum, Boeseman was also active in the resistance. On October 4, 1943 he was arrested and jailed in Leiden. When Boschma received the permission to publish Boeseman's thesis in English at the end of October, Boeseman was already imprisoned in Amsterdam. In January he was transferred to concentration camp

Vught. From 25 May 1944 - 25 April 1945 he was imprisoned and forced to work in the German concentration camp Dachau. He was able to return to Oegstgeest on June 2, 1945, resumed his research in the museum on July 1, but on August 15 he became ill. Boeseman's health had suffered badly from the experiences, and in the years after the war until the early fifties he had several long periods of relapse and recovery, during which he was unable to work. On March 1, 1947 he was appointed curator, and on the 26th of the same month he successfully defended his doctoral theses "Revision of the fishes collected by Bürger and von Siebold in Japan" at Leiden University. This work in which all RMNH specimens of the species described by Temminck & Schlegel in the *Fauna Japonica* were examined and many lectotypes were designated, became a standard work for Japanese fish taxonomy. Boeseman in his later years humbly said it was "A sin of my youth" and "I wrote this work when I thought I knew everything". Nevertheless he was widely acknowledged for his knowledge of the fishes of the von Siebold collection.

After he had successfully defended his thesis, Boeseman resumed his research on the Dermoptera completing a manuscript early in October. On November 1, 1947 Boeseman was appointed head of the fish department. In 1947 and 1948 he worked on several small collections, the results were published in four papers in 1948 and 1949. From 1949 through October 1951 was again ill and recovering.

In 1953 Boeseman spent six months in El Salvador not only collecting fishes, but also crustaceans, amphibians and reptiles, insects etc. As he had never joined a collecting trip of a colleague, he had to discover the tricks of collecting mostly by himself.



Fig. 1. Drs M. Boeseman, L.D. Brongersma and L.B. Holthuis in 1954 with some specimens from New Guinea.

From October 1954 through May 1955 Boeseman took part in an even longer collecting expedition to New Guinea with Drs L.D. Brongersma and L.B. Holthuis (fig. 1).

In 1957, he became a victim of the last Dutch epidemic of poliomyelitis, which among others restricted the use of his right arm. In spite of the physical restraints, Boeseman continued all his professional activities and he made long collecting trips to Surinam (1963-64, 1971) and shorter ones to Trinidad, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Eastern Atlantic. He published widely on many groups of fishes from different regions, had a soft spot for sharks and rays, but became a specialist in the South American Catfish family, the Loricariidae. Probably as an extension of this research, the European catfish (*Silurus glanis*) also received his special attention. Among ichthyologists he became well known as a specialist on the Bleeker collection. His experience and knowledge of this subject was indispensable for the publication of the two series of reprints of Bleeker papers, as well as the reprint of the *Atlas Ichthyologique*, especially for the volume with the unpublished plates. Boeseman published about a hundred papers, few of them with co-authors.

As a curator of fishes, he considered it as his main duty to share his profound knowledge of the RMNH fish collection with other ichthyologists. His own research was subordinate to this. In 1977 Boeseman was chosen as an Honorary Foreign Member in Ichthyology of the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists. In 1994 he was elected as an Honorary Member of the European Ichthyological Society.

At the RMNH Boeseman as a member of the Library committee dedicated much time to the library and many of the acquisitions are due to his perusing of sale catalogues. Over the years he developed a growing interest in the history of ichthyology and history of art.

In 1977 and 1979 he made trips to Leningrad and Krakow to study and photograph drawings of north-eastern Brazilian animals made by Albert Eckhout and Marcgrave during the reign of Johan Maurits van Nassau (1637-1644).

During the period when Boeseman was curator, the RMNH fish collection was expanded with thousands of fishes collected by Boeseman himself and the fishes collected during the CANCAP expeditions in the eastern central Atlantic. Because of his fruitful personal contacts with many colleagues and the excellent reputation that the RMNH fish collection had as a storing facility, type specimens of many species were donated to the museum. An exceptional donation was a specimen of *Latimeria chalumnae* in 1965 (fig. 2).

In the fish collection Boeseman introduced the use of red dots on the jars and on the labels of the stuffed fishes as a recognition mark for types. He also designed a new card system, one card per register number. Boeseman was very pertinent in his rule that



Fig. 2. Dr Boeseman and technical assistants A. de Lange and J. van Egmond with the RMNH coelacanth around 1971.

nobody but he himself was allowed to change the data on the card or place the card back into the drawer. His sharp eye for detail made him at the same time feared and praised as an editor. For many years he was highly valued as an editor of the museum journals: his critical comments improved manuscripts of many colleagues.

After his retirement in 1981 Boeseman remained a regular visitor of the RMNH for as long as he had a small room to continue his work (fig. 3). He had been closely involved in the reprint series of Bleeker's *Atlas Ichthyologique* and in 1981 he travelled to Taiwan to supervise the printing of the volume with the unpublished plates. He extended his great interest in historical aspects of ichthyology and zoology in general (shared with his valued colleague the late Dr Peter Whitehead), resulting in several publications on drawings of plants and animals in 17th-century Brazil. In 2002 Boeseman was awarded the Albert Eckhout medal for his contribution to the historic zoological research in Brazil. However, he also continued to publish papers on catfishes, sharks and other fishes, and wrote an excellent paper on the history of collectors and fish collections of the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie (1820-1980) for an ASIH special publication.



Fig. 3. Dr Boeseman at work after his retirement.

A review of the six principal zoological works by Martinus Houttuyn (1720-1798) co-authored by the second author and published in 2004, was his last contribution to science. In Martinus Houttuyn he admired the zeal to share his knowledge about natural history with others, without aiming at personal recognition – a characteristic that well may apply to Marinus Boeseman himself. Always willing to share his broad knowledge, he was a very reliable and fast replying correspondent, who invested much time in answering all kinds of questions related to the collection. His aristocratic manner and somewhat austere look at times made him seem a bit unapproachable, but he was a gentleman. To all visitors to the Fish collection of the RMNH he has been an excellent host.

Dr Boeseman was decorated twice; in 1980 he was appointed Officer in the Order of Oranje Nassau and in 1981 he received the Resistance memorial cross. Boeseman is survived by two sons and three grandsons.

Chronological List of publications

- Boeseman, M., J. van der Drift, J.M. van Roon, N. Tinbergen & J.J. ter Pelkwijk, 1938. De bittervoorns en hun mossels.— *De Levende Natuur*, 43: 129-136, figs 1-7.
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Taxa named after M. Boeseman

Corydoras boesemani Nijssen & Isbrücker, 1967
Halaelurus boesemani Springer & D'Aubry, 1972
Hemigrammus micropterus boesemani Gery, 1959 (= *Hemigrammus boesemani*)
Melanotaenia boesemani Allen & Cross, 1980
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