

## L.B. Holthuis, 'The institutional Memory' of the Leiden Museum - Obituary

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The Nationaal Natuurhistorisch Museum, Naturalis suffered a great loss when, on 7 March of this year, the emeritus curator of Crustacea, Prof. Dr. L.B. Holthuis, passed away after a short illness.

Lipke Bijdeley Holthuis<sup>1</sup> was born on 21 April 1921 in Probolinggo, East Java, Indonesia. His parents were from Friesland in the north of the Netherlands. His father, Barnard Jan Holthuis (1881-1961), was a schoolteacher and became director of a training school for local civil servants in Probolinggo. His mother, Neeltje bij de Ley (1891-1976), also was a schoolteacher before her marriage. Lipke had one sister, Antje Grietje. He grew up under the sun of Java. This must have been a happy childhood. He had many good memories from that time, the friendly atmosphere and the life outdoors. The family returned to the Netherlands for an eight months' leave in 1925. Although Lipke was only four years old at that time, he remembered the journey by boat and the passing of the Suez Canal very well. The Holthuis family returned permanently to the Netherlands in 1928. Lipke attended high school in The Hague where the family was living. In 1937 they moved to Oegstgeest, a village west of Leiden. In the same year Lipke started his Biology study at the University of Leiden. Due to the war, Leiden University had to close on 15 November 1941. Just four days before this date, several students among which Lipke Holthuis was one, were allowed to graduate due to the willingness of the Leiden professors. After his graduation, he was appointed assistant curator at the 'Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie' (RMNH), Leiden. On 23 January 1946 he defended his dissertation on 'The Decapoda Macrura of the Snellius Expedition I'. His promotor was the Director of the Leiden Museum, Prof. Dr. Hilbrand Boschma, for whom he had a deep admiration. This admiration becomes apparent in the obituary he wrote about his fellow Frisian (Holthuis, 1976).

Dr. L.B. Holthuis dedicated his life to the taxonomy and systematics of Crustacea. His scientific career started in 1941 with his first publications. From that time on he had an increasingly prolific production, by now totalling 617 titles, ca. 20.000 pages. As a curator he had a key to the Museum at the Raamsteeg which allowed him to start the day at around 5 a.m., long before the other personnel entered. He worked steadily in his room, wasting no time on coffee breaks in the museum canteen or on lunch outdoors. When he was not in his room one could find him in the library. During working hours he always had time for his colleagues who often came to him for scientific advice related to the history of our collections or nomenclatorial issues. Every day around 6 p.m. he returned to his small flat, spending part of the evening on his species catalogues and editorial work for the journal *Crustaceana*. He kept to this discipline six days a week until a month before his death.

The first publications showing his interest in the history of natural history dealt with the early editions of Lacepède's 'Tableaux des Mammifères et des Oiseaux' (Husson and Holthuis, 1953), followed by papers on the famous carcinologist Rafinesque (Holthuis, 1954, 1955). His interest in the subject grew with the years when more and more papers with a historical connotation were published.

Through the research for his thesis (1946, published in the journal *Temminckia* the year after), Holthuis became familiar with Japanese crustaceans of the Siebold collection which were described by De Haan in the *Fauna Japonica*. Likely the contact with his fellow student M. Boeseman, who in the same period worked on a thesis of the fishes collected by Bürger & von Siebold, increased his interest in and knowledge of the Japanese part of the RMNH collection. In 1953, in a paper on the dates of publication of the Crustacea volume of the *Fauna Japonica*, Holthuis included a biographical note on Wilhem de Haan. From then on, investigating and publishing papers on the lives of persons who had made contributions to taxonomy and/or

<sup>1</sup> In Dutch his name is pronounced as [holt hæys].

the history of the Leiden Museum would become one of the favourite research subjects of Holthuis.

As many Japanese carcinologists visited the RMNH or requested information on the collection, Holthuis' correspondence with Japanese colleagues increased and he became more and more interested in the history of Japan. Apparently Holthuis' quiet, respectful and helpful attitude fitted well with the Japanese attitude and with many Japanese colleagues Holthuis established lasting friendly relations. For many of them Christmas presents from Holthuis became a tradition.

In 1971 Holthuis and Prof. Dr. W. Vervoort, the then director of the RMNH, were invited to meet H.I.H. Emperor Hirohito in Palace 'Huis ten Bosch' in The Hague. Holthuis recalled that after a rather formal start, the conversation with His Majesty the Emperor suddenly went smoothly when they touched the topic of marine biology.

During the 1980s the stream of visitors from Japan in the museum was so constant that the standing explanation for Holthuis' absence during the monthly staff meetings was: 'Prof Holthuis has a Japanese visitor'.

In 1967 Holthuis, at the invitation of Dr. T. Sakai, published his first paper on early European investigations on Japanese carcinology, in which he described the activities of Kaempfer, Thunberg, von Siebold and Bürger. Holthuis admired the contagious enthusiasm and achievements of the young, energetic von Siebold, but did not have a high opinion of the older von Siebold, who became increasingly involved in politics and neglected natural history. For their impressive publication, Holthuis & Sakai (1970) 'Ph.F. von Siebold and Fauna Japonica', in which the Crustacean watercolours of Kawahara Keiga were published in colour for the first time, Holthuis (in litt.) insisted that a picture of the *young* von Siebold was included, not one of the 'grumpy' older von Siebold. Later in his life Holthuis became more and more impressed by the collection gathered by Bürger, von Siebold's assistant and successor at Deshima, Japan.

His curiosity about the history of the zoology of Japan induced Holthuis to assemble a large private collection of books on the subject. His collection of publications, pamphlets and cuttings from journals and newspapers on the enigmatic Philipp von Siebold must be almost unrivalled.

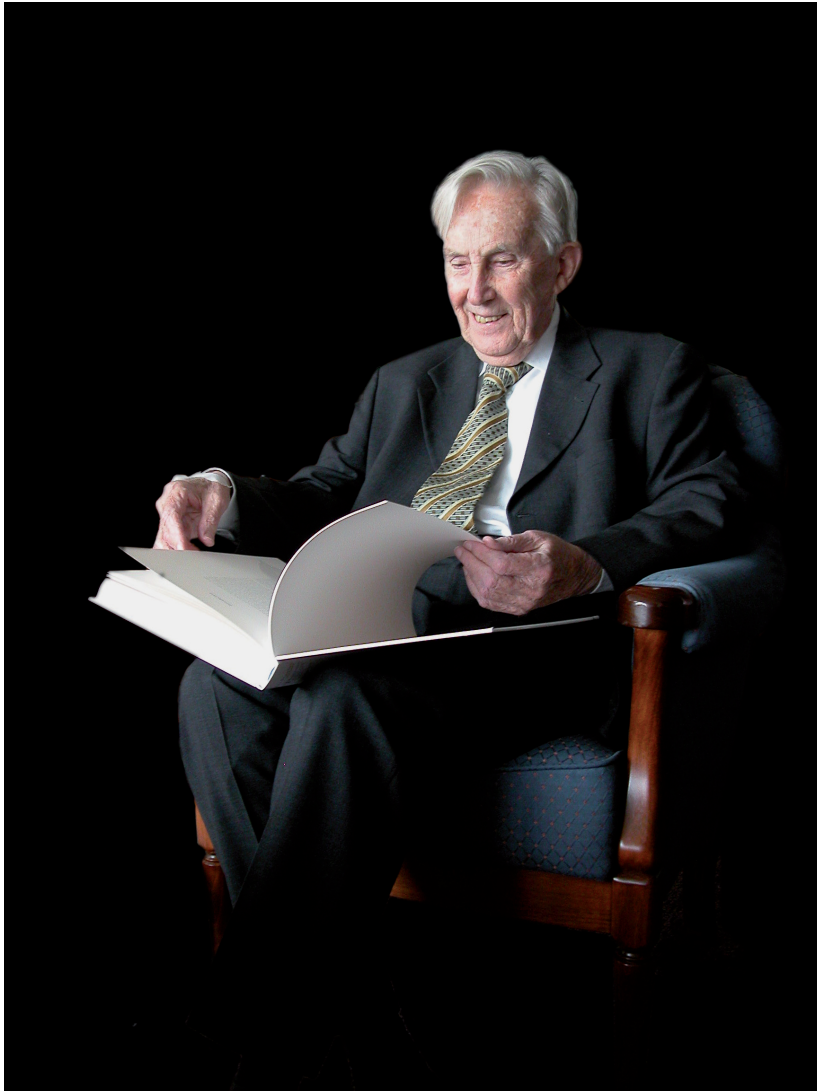
Holthuis' library and knowledge of the Siebold collection was beneficial to the studies of Dr. T. Yamaguchi, a Japanese carcinologist who devoted a large part of his research to the Siebold collection. In Yamaguchi

Holthuis found a person equally passionate about the history of the Natural History of Japan. From 1985, when Yamaguchi visited the RMNH for the first time, Holthuis (with Yamaguchi) published a number of papers on the Siebold collection in journals like *Crustaceana* and *Calanus* (Holthuis, 1987, 1993a, b, 1996, 1997; Yamaguchi & Holthuis, 1993, 2001). Although many of Holthuis' papers dealing with our Japanese collection are published in carcinological journals, they are equally interesting to other Japan oriented zoologists. Holthuis, by his outstanding, thorough research in all kinds of archives, has made a lasting contribution to the knowledge of the history of the zoology of Japan.

His major contribution to the knowledge of the history of the Leiden museum was his book on the museum's history between 1820 and 1958 (Holthuis, 1995). In this work he meticulously and systematically describes the people who made the institute one of the foremost Natural History Museums in the world. The type-catalogue of the decapod collection with an appendix on 'The pre-1900 sources of Crustacean material of 's Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie' (Fransen, *et al.*, 1997) is another important contribution. The information in this appendix was compiled by Holthuis. Over the years he had gathered information on all persons who collected crustacean specimens for the Leiden museum. This archive is not only of importance to the department of Crustacea, all departments benefit from it. In his search for information on these collectors he acquired many books, portraits, autographs, etc. If, for instance, he could not find a date of birth of one of the collectors, he would write to the archives of the municipality concerned, anxiously waiting for a response and excited when a puzzle was solved. Colleagues within and outside the museum were always provided with very detailed information when they appealed to his encyclopaedic knowledge. He was regarded 'The institutional Memory' of the Leiden Museum where he worked for 67 years of his life.

The personnel of the Leiden Museum and Holthuis' numerous friends and colleagues will greatly miss him. Holthuis donated his entire collection of books, reprints, drawings and paintings to Naturalis. This beautiful collection stamped 'Bibliotheca Crustaceana L.B. Holthuis', ensures that the name Holthuis will remain attached to the memory of the Leiden museum.

For a complete listing of all publications by L.B. Holthuis see: [www.repository.naturalis.nl](http://www.repository.naturalis.nl).



*L. B. Holthuis*

Lipke Bijdeley Holthuis  
21 April 1921 - 7 March 2008  
(Photograph by Theodor Pietsch, 2007, retouched by Bert Kroonenberg)

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