



## Memories

MARINE MAMMAL SCIENCE, 27(4): 899–903 (October 2011)  
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DOI: 10.1111/j.1748-7692.2011.00535.x



DR. ROBERT HENRY CLARKE  
1919–2011  
Oceanographer, M.A. (Oxon), Dr. Philos. (Oslo)

Dr. Clarke was born in Camberwell, South London, England, on 6 March 1919. He studied as an open scholar at St. Olave and St. Savior's Grammar School (1932–1938). After being awarded a full government scholarship, he read Natural Science at New College, Oxford University. In 1939 his studies were interrupted by the start of World War II when he volunteered as a Lieutenant in the British Navy, Admiralty Unexploded Bomb Department with operations in various seas; and the Admiralty

Research and Development (India), with special operations in India, Burma, and Ceylon (1940–1946). At the end of the war he returned to conclude his studies at Oxford where he was awarded a Masters Degree (Honours).

Robert's involvement with whales and whaling began with his appointment as Second Inspector on the British whale factory ship *Southern Harvester* for the Antarctic season 1947/1948. Thereafter until 1971 he worked as a marine biologist in Discovery Investigations, British Colonial Office, and later as a Principal Scientific Officer in the UK National Institute of Oceanography. In 1949 he visited the open-boat whaling stations in the Azores, and this seems to have sparked his life-long interest in sperm whales, the main target of the Azorean whalers. His studies in the Azores led to the award of a Doctor Philosophiae degree at the University of Oslo, with the thesis "Sperm whales of the Azores," and his two Discovery Reports, "Open boat whaling in the Azores . . ." (Clarke 1954) and "Sperm whales of the Azores" (Clarke 1956) remain essential reference publications for students, whaling historians and biologists studying sperm whales. Indeed, the latter paper was recently translated to Portuguese and republished (Clarke 2001). In 1950 he participated in the last voyage of the RRS *William Scoresby*, to the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and in the voyage of the *Enern* to the Antarctic in 1953, being largely responsible for the whale marking operations on both (Clarke and Ruud 1954). This experience convinced him of the need for a mark smaller than the standard 12-bore Discovery mark for tagging smaller individuals and species, and this seems to have stimulated the subsequent development of the .410 mark.

Robert's keen interest in anything to do with sperm whales led him to describe poorly-known species such as the sea devil angler fish, *Ceratias holbølli*, which he discovered in the stomach of a sperm whale on the *Southern Harvester*. This particularly well-preserved specimen resides in the Natural History Museum in London and can still be observed today at the Museum's new Darwin Centre. His knowledge of sperm whales and open-boat whaling led him to be headhunted in 1956 as Scientific and Technical Adviser for the film *Moby Dick*, directed by John Huston, filmed in the Azores and Canary Islands; and later, in 1968, he produced *Barbed Waters*, a documentary on open-boat whaling in the Azores.

In 1958 he was seconded to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) as a P5 grade whale biologist posted to South America. He collaborated with the Permanent Commission of the South Pacific<sup>1</sup> by training local biologists to work on whaling station platforms and laboratories in Chile and Peru. They biologically examined the carcasses of over 2,000 sperm whales, the results of which were later published in a seven volume series "Sperm whales of the Southeast Pacific." During his posting in South America he coordinated and implemented expeditions to observe and mark whales: in Chile on board the *Indus X* in 1958, and on the *Indus XIV* in 1964; and in Ecuador on the patrol ship *El Oro* in 1959 to survey whales between the continent and the Galapagos Islands and beyond (Clarke 1962). For the very first time, whale research in this part of the world had begun.

<sup>1</sup>Comisión Permanente del Pacífico Sur (CPPS).

To Anelio Aguayo, Robert's student and collaborator from 1958 to 1994, Robert was not only his professor, but also a great friend, full of joviality, always interested in preparing and enjoying international cuisine. In his homes in England, Chile, Mexico, and Peru, Robert always took pleasure in attending his guests and friends, and used to stay up late sharing friendship and telling stories accompanied by a bottle of fine liquor. The ever English gentleman, Robert would always dress up for dinner, but also effortlessly blended in everywhere and quickly adopted exquisite local customs; he was devoted to Chilean wine, to Peruvian pisco, and was also very fond of Ecuadorian music.

When he completed his commitment with FAO, Robert went on as one of the international experts who set the foundations for the creation of the Marine Research Institute of Peru<sup>2</sup> (IMARPE), before returning to his post at the National Institute of Oceanography in Surrey, England, where he worked until 1971. At this point his life changed dramatically when he and his young family decided to go back to Peru to help the victims of the 1970 earthquake in the north of the country, and in 1972 returned again to England until 1978 when he received an offer by the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California in Ensenada, Mexico, to lecture on oceanography and marine biology. Later he moved to Merida in Yucatan, contracted by the "Centro de Investigaciones" to lecture and coordinate research on the marine fauna of the peninsula of Yucatan, until early 1982. While in Mexico, he took part in a survey of cetaceans in the North Pacific, on the R/V *David Starr Jordan*.

In 1982 he returned to Peru with his family and settled in San Andrés, a small artisanal fishing village near Pisco, where he was dedicated to writing and publishing the results of his sperm whale investigations in the Southeast Pacific together with his wife and coauthor marine biologist Obla Paliza (Clarke and Paliza 1972, 1988, 1994, 2000; Clarke *et al.* 1968, 1988, 1993, 1994). The final Part VII of the series, on reproduction in the female sperm whale, is to be published in the Latin American Journal of Aquatic Mammals (LAJAM) (Clarke and Paliza, in press).

In 2001 he was invited to lead whale observations in the expedition "Ballenas Libres" on the Patrol Ship *Rio Tambo* in the north of Peru. And later that year, on the Ecuadorian research ship *Orion*, he was part of the international scientific team sighting cetaceans between Guayaquil and the Galapagos Islands, just as he had done for the first time in 1959. During these voyages he noticed that the population of Humboldt giant squid, *Dosidicus gigas*, had been severely depleted owing to its excessive exploitation during the 1990s by factory ships from South Korea and Japan. Prey depletion may have forced the sperm whale of the Southeast Pacific to migrate to other seas to feed. This seemed to be corroborated in a paper by Jaquet *et al.* (2003), who reported sperm whales photo-identified around the Galapagos Islands, later identified in the Gulf of California, and suggested this as possible evidence for the migration of sperm whales due to scarcity of prey in the Southeast Pacific. In a fascinating review of historical and modern literature and his own investigations Robert explored the origin of ambergris as a coprolite (Clarke 2006).

<sup>2</sup>Instituto del Mar del Perú, Callao.

When a major earthquake (7.9 on the Richter scale) and tsunami hit the province of Pisco in 2007, Robert was very much affected because the sea flooded his home destroying about a third of his unique book collection including hundreds of scientific journals and documents, besides most of his personal belongings and those of his family. As a result of this tragedy, six months later he decided to write a testimony of the destruction, and considering the number of victims (well over 500 deaths and many unaccounted for) and the devastation of Pisco's historic monuments, he felt it was necessary to publish a book for future generations. This is how the book *PISCO, history, industry and biodiversity before and after the earthquake of 2007*, written together with his wife, was conceived and later launched at the Town Hall of San Andres, Pisco, in December 2010, and later at the Ricardo Palma Home-Museum, Lima, in February 2011 where Robert addressed the public for the last time. At the end of February 2011 he fell ill with pneumonia, passing away peacefully at his beloved home and in the company of his wife on the evening of 8 May, having spent only that morning observing the southeast Pacific that he loved so much, and to which he dedicated much of his life. Now, as he had wished, his ashes form part of the Humboldt Current.

Robert was author/coauthor of more than 100 scientific publications, some of them in book format; he was an active member of the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission (1955–1970), and a member of various International Scientific Societies. He was very much appreciated for the seriousness of his research, his independent critical thinking, and his resilience in adversity. Robert was a host *extraordinaire* and charmed every visitor with his unconventional wit, kindness, and congeniality. At the same time he was regarded by his colleagues as a colorful character: dressed in a red-lined cape, monocle, and broad-brimmed black hat, he cut a striking and somewhat flamboyant figure in late twentieth century England. Throughout his career Robert remained interested in whaling, its history and products, possessing at one time an impressive collection of whaling irons and scrimshaw, and refusing to join the ranks of those who condemned whaling outright. In later life his calm disposition and wise advice provided guidance to many. In the late 1980s, when a violent insurgency and repression crippled Peruvian society into chaos and threatened the viability of cetacean research, one of us (KVV) went to consult him on whether to leave Peru. Robert had evaluated a move to Ecuador himself, but on the question, memorably, he slowly inhaled his *cigarillo negro*, leaned over with gentle authority: "Why even consider, Koen you love this never-never-land as much as I do, and we cannot abandon our goals, can we?" He paused again, heaved his glass of *pisco puro* to Peru, his steel blue eyes smiling and concluded "So, we just cope." We all stayed put. That was vintage Robert.

He is survived by his wife and colleague Obla, his sons Aravec and George, his daughter Suyana, and granddaughter Catherine.

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