THE PEOPLE BEHIND FISHBASE AND SEALIFEBASE

EMILY CAPULI: THREE DECADES AT FISHBASE

EMILY CAPULI

says that when she started working for FishBase three decades ago, her hair was darker and longer.

She may look different now but her interest in documenting the fishes found globally has not changed a bit. She continues to do this by 'fishing' for new species and documenting taxonomic changes in FishBase. This is what Emily has been doing for the past 30 years.

The marine biologist joined the FishBase team right after completing her master's degree at the University of the Philippines. Her goal was to do something different from the field and lab work she had been conducting during her studies.

"The first work I did for FishBase included documenting the fishes found in the Philippines and I still continue doing it now and find it very important to do for my country," Capuli said. "Other than this, I enjoy working on the taxonomic aspect of FishBase, the development and creation of tools using the species data."

From team leader to 'theme' leader

From research assistant at different levels, Emily became a senior research associate in 2003 thanks to the work she started doing with an increasing number of taxonomists, focusing on the development and evolution of the database.

"Rainer (Froese) called me a team leader then and after 30 years of working mainly on species taxonomy, I'm now called a 'theme leader' for taxonomy involved with FishBase and SeaLifeBase," she said. "Come to think of it, the spelling of the title also evolved!"

For Emily, all projects she has worked on have been rewarding in one way or another but one of the things she has come to appreciate the most in her career is the mentorship she acquires from colleagues and other scientists on all-things FishBase/SeaLifeBase.

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Learning more about marine life can be both a lifelong interest and a challenge. Emily believes there are hundreds of projects that can be done using the wealth of information in FishBase and SeaLifeBase but the key is finding the time, resources and people to carry them out.

"I really hope FishBase and SeaLifeBase go on forever and that we are succeeded by a 'new species' of dedicated people who will have new vision and foresight to sustain these Global Species Databases," she said.

Remember to have fun

On the lighter side of things, Capuli has had fun getting to know all the different people that have been involved with the project throughout the years.

Informal settings, such as music jams held at Rainer Froese's place 'back in the day' have been important team-building opportunities where Emily got to know people beyond the professional level and make lasting friends.

The ICLARM band. Emily was one of the backup singers for the group led by Rainer Froese, Roger Pullin and Jay Maclean.

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SUSAN LUNA: SUPPORTING FISHBASE SINCE THE EARLY DAYS

SUSAN LUNA,

also known as Tuttay, has been with FishBase even before the project was born.

Back in 1989, she started working with Daniel Pauly at the International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management ICLARM, and as FishBase was being conceived, she was quickly recruited into the project.

Her job? Testing the database prototype being developed by Rainer Froese, which involved sending printed pages of complete encoded information from the database for different subjects such as species biology, morphology, distribution or countries via snail mail to Rainer in Kiel, Germany.

“When FishBase was finally launched as a project in 1990, I - together with another colleague from the Aquaculture Program at ICLARM, Belen Acosta - began working on the database,” Luna recalled.

After spending almost three decades as a researcher at FishBase, Tuttay - who studied Marine Science at the University of the Philippines - decided to switch gears. In 2018, she became an executive assistant at the recently-created Quantitative Aquatics, an organization that manages FishBase, SeaLifeBase and AquaMaps. At Q-quatics, she provides high-level support to the executive director, Mary Ann Bimbao, on all matters pertaining to administrative, human resources, and financial affairs.

The new role allows her to help address what she perceives to be the biggest challenge these legacy projects are facing nowadays: continuous research funding.

Susan believes that guaranteeing that these databases remain alive is very important for humanity’s growing knowledge of marine life.

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"I hope that the legacy of FishBase and SeaLifeBase will continue long after we are gone and that provision for development and maintenance will always come," she said. "I'm sure that the global scope of FishBase guarantees that work on this database will never cease as information and knowledge are continuously generated."

Susan Luna and some of the ICLARM staff in 1989.