

# SKIT BARILE: THE PROGRAMMING FORCE BEHIND FISHBASE AND SEALIFEBASE

## WHEN Ma. JOSEPHINE BARILE,

aka Skit, joined FishBase back in 1998, she knew very little about the programming software being used to update the database and make it available to users. Yet, all she needed was a two-week trial period to get a good grasp of it and become the lead person in charge of maintaining the encoding application, the database, and coordinating the CD releases of FishBase.

"I had to make things work for that trial period, with my two besties on hand: The MS Access 97 Step by Step book, and the FishBase Book," she recalls.

From then on, Skit was tasked with handling the programming and production of the releases of FishBase in CD/DVD which were then in MS Access, for versions 1998, 1999, 2000, and 2004. She also supervised the production of the web-based version in 2013.



But it's not like Skit landed in FishBase like a blank sheet of paper. Not only did she have a bachelor's degree in computer science under her belt, but she also had been working for five years as a programmer for a UNDP project titled 'Genetic Improvement of Farmed Tilapia (GIFT),' which was developed at the International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management (ICLARM), FishBase's first home.

"I developed and maintained the GIFT database on its experimental data, as well as its encoding application. When the project ended in 1997, management kindly offered me to apply to three job openings at that time," Skit says. "Of the three, the programmer position in FishBase was, for me, the right choice for advancing my software development skills."

Moving from one species of fish to virtually all fish species in the world was both challenging and exciting for Skit but – as time would prove –, she excels at dealing with new, unprecedented tasks.

## THE PEOPLE BEHIND FISHBASE AND SEALIFEBASE

When FishBase moved to the internet, she was able to continue on with database programming and supported a smooth as possible transition to the web while, at the same time, taking on special projects such as providing programming support for the production of published checklists, working on the Catalog of Fishes with Dr. William Eschmeyer, organizing an Asia regional capacity building workshop on developing aquatic information systems, and developing the prototype of AquaMaps and its early versions.

By the time SeaLifeBase was born in 2005, Skit's professional climb had led her to take on the role of senior research programmer, a position that is called IT theme leader nowadays.

Even though balancing administrative and technical work, taking on bigger responsibilities under funding pressures and keeping FishBase and SeaLifeBase up to date in terms of software technology has been challenging at times, she finds her work very rewarding because she gets to contribute, even if behind the scenes, to the greater good delivered by these global biodiversity information systems.

Reflecting on what she hopes for the future of these two databases, Skit can only think about a famous quote from a beloved movie character: "To infinity and beyond!"



Skit loves the camaraderie that reigns within the FishBase/SeaLifeBase team. She particularly remembers a holiday party organized by the IT Group where everyone wore fun eyewear.

In her view, the fact that FishBase and SeaLifeBase are up and running 30 and 15 years after they were created, is proof of their value.

"You see it in scientific publications, websites that link to them as resources, data requests from different sectors, online communities built around them, projects developed, to mention some," Skit says. "Even with that, there is still more that FishBase and SeaLifeBase can serve. I really hope that there will always be champions who will ensure their continuity."



With Nicolas Bailly at the FishBase 15th anniversary event.