

OBITUARY:

In Memoriam: Johan Paul Schulz (1921-1999)

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Joop Schulz's professional career spanned some fifty years of pioneering conservation work. He died, aged 78, on 25 June 1999.

Born in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), Joop grew up in Batavia (Djakarta). Just before the start of World War II the family returned to The Netherlands, where he enrolled in the Tropical Agricultural College in Deventer. After graduation, he served for five years in the Intelligence Unit of the Dutch army, and subsequently enrolled in the State University of Utrecht where he received a MSc in Biology. From 1954 to 1958, Joop undertook an ecological study on the tropical rainforest in Suriname, which earned him a PhD Cum Laude from the School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences of the University of Utrecht. His dissertation: "Ecological Studies on Rainforest in Northern Suriname" became a rainforest ecology classic.

Joop returned to Suriname where he was placed in charge of the Research and Silviculture Departments of the Surinam Forest Service. He was not only an excellent biologist, but also a consummate conservationist so that in 1965, when through his efforts, Nature Conservation became a separate department in the Forest Service, he was appointed as its first Director. He also set up the Foundation for Nature Preservation in Suriname (STINASU) to assist the Conservation Department in its work. He left no stone unturned in promoting conservation among Suriname's political leaders and, through his initiative and lobbying, a number of nature reserves were legally established. The result was that Suriname became a model for conservation practices for neighboring countries.

Joop's interest in sea turtle conservation was piqued when it became apparent that some of the remote coastal areas in Suriname contained major nesting beaches. It appeared logical to him that the other Guianas (Guyana and French Guiana) would also have sea turtle nesting beaches. During 1963 and 1964, Joop organized and undertook six expeditions along the isolated and inhospitable coast of the Guianas, and confirmed that the region was of great significance for nesting sea turtles, and their conservation. His survey in French Guiana was the first to confirm the presence of the

important leatherback nesting beach previously only rumored to exist near Les Hattes.

During the period 1969-1973, Joop designed and conducted an extensive tagging program which established that after nesting, Suriname green turtles migrate to foraging grounds off the coast of Brazil, the leatherbacks disperse throughout the Atlantic Ocean, and the olive ridleys remain mostly in the offshore region between the Orinoco and Amazon Rivers.

It was also established that Eilanti Beach, in the Galibi Nature Reserve, was the most important olive ridley nesting beach in the Western Atlantic Ocean. The latter is regrettably no longer the case; it even appears that the olive ridley population in the Guianas may disappear altogether in the foreseeable future.

Joop retired in 1980, but that only gave him more time to devote to sea turtle conservation. Between 1984 and 1993 he conducted six sea turtle surveys in Indonesia: from the South China Sea to the Arafuru Sea. Based on his findings, he wrote a management plan for sea turtle conservation in Indonesia, and was also instrumental in the gazetting of the Southeast Aru Marine Reserve.

Joop was one of the original charter members of the IUCN Sea Turtle Specialist Group. His many contributions to sea turtle conservation have been officially acknowledged by various awards and, more importantly, by the acknowledgement he received from his peers.

Although best known by most of us for his pioneering work with sea turtles, his knowledge and skills covered several scientific disciplines – exhibiting considerable expertise in each one of them, Joop Schulz was indeed a remarkable man.

I have lost my mentor and my close friend; conservation has lost someone who has championed many causes, and touched many lives. Although few of the younger sea turtle workers will have known him, Joop Schulz was one of the pioneers, and a major force in the struggle to ensure the survival of sea turtles. He will be sadly missed and we offer our condolences to his widow, Nienke, and to his children.