OBITUARY

Professor Rolf Garms

1931–2021

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Rolf Garms began studying zoology at the University of Hamburg in 1950 and was awarded a PhD in 1958. He was employed at the BNITM in 1962 working there until 1996 when he retired, but he continued working as an emeritus professor until his final illness. In 1958 he was appointed Director of the Liberian Research Unit of the BNITM, based at Bong Mine. Rolf Garms achieved his habilitation (an academic procedure common in Germany as a prerequisite to becoming a full professor) in 1984 and the venia legendi (an authority to teach, given a successful habilitation) in 1988. In 1992, Dr. Garms was appointed as full professor at the University of Hamburg.

After initiating his career with research on mosquitoes, Rolf began his lifelong fascination with blackflies during extensive and arduous fieldwork in Guinea where he discovered new species, documented the distribution of Simulium damnosum s.l., and conducted trials of DDT and fenthion on the latter. He pursued similar research in Liberia and this West African experience led to his subsequent contributions to the World Health Organization’s Onchocerciasis Control Programme in West Africa (OCP). He was involved from the outset, being one of the scientists who attended the first planning meeting in Tunis in 1968 (WHO 1969), which led to the Preparatory Assistance to Governments Mission whose report in November 1973 (WHO 1973) was followed by the foundation of the OCP in January 1974. Dr. Garms was a member of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee of the OCP, and he was soon involved as a consultant, especially when the programme could not explain the continued presence of biting flies in controlled zones. Suspecting reinvasions from untreated areas, Rolf masterminded pioneering studies with John Davies and Frank Walsh that demonstrated that savannah members of the Simulium damnosum species complex could migrate as far as 500 km. For this work, they were awarded the
forms of: 'Beffa' (Meredith, Cheke, & Garms 1987). A new freshwater crab, *Potamonautes rukwanzii* Corace, Cumberlidge, & Garms 2001 was also discovered during his fieldwork in Uganda. Furthermore he is remembered in the eponymous *Simulium garmsi* Crosskey 1969, *Onchocerca garmsi* Schulz-Key & Bain 1976 (a parasite of Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*), two Muscid flies *Pyrellina garmsi* Zielke 1971 and *Helina garmsi* Zielke 1974 and the Saturniid moth *Orthogonioptilum garmsi* Bouyer 1995. Also, a pygmy grasshopper (Orthoptera: Tettigidae) that he collected in Liberia will soon be named after him, reflecting some of his other entomological interests, which also encompassed Tiger beetles (Coleoptera: Cicindelidae).

During his last 10 years, Dr. Garms was involved in research on native European and invasive mosquitoes of metropolitan Hamburg, including studies of host-feeding patterns and the presence of viruses in mosquitoes. Research on native mosquitoes had almost ceased after the disappearance of malaria in Europe. Thus, Rolf concluded his research work on topics with which he had started his scientific career at BNITM in the 1960s, and he continued to support graduate students during sampling campaigns and drafting manuscripts. The demise of Dr. Garms will certainly leave a huge vacuum in the field of transmission and control of onchocerciasis (WHO 1987) and characterisation of the *Simulium* vector. His legacy of hard work and a lifetime’s dedication to his subject will continue to inspire us all, as we remember a humble and charming man, possessed of an enviable intelligence and scientific acumen.

In 1958, Rolf Garms married Elke Biel who survives him, along with their son Gunnar and their daughters Grietje and Janna.

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