



Obituary

Dr. habil. Wilfried Schönborn (1934–2016)



Shortly after his 82nd birthday, Wilfried Schönborn passed away in Jena. He was the editor-in-chief of *Limnologia* for twelve years.

Wilfried Schönborn always kept an eye on the ecosystem as a whole. Schönborn's interest ranged from single-celled organisms to birds and mammals, from basic research to applied research topics. With his inexhaustible knowledge and his amiable nature, he awakened the interest of those around him for the ecology of waters.

Schönborn was born on the 3rd of February 1934 in Harbke in the district of Oschersleben, which is now part of Sachsen-Anhalt. He completed his school time in 1953 in the former East Germany (GDR). Fascinated by life in and around the pond, Wilfried Schönborn started his studies in biology at the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena. In 1958, he finished his studies with a diploma thesis on the topic "Faunistic and Ecological Studies at the Saale River". Subsequently, he started his work at the German Academy of Sciences (*Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften*), which founded a Research Centre for Limnology (*Forschungsstelle für Limnologie*) in 1959 with headquarters in Jena and a field office in Neuglobsow at Stechlinsee. One task of the Research Centre for Limnology was to study the effects of exhaust heat from the nuclear power plant Rheinsberg, located on shore of Lake Stechlin, on the aquatic community and matter balance of Lake Stechlin and neighbouring lakes. Within the framework of this multidisciplinary project, Schönborn studied the microbenthos, in particular the Testacea. He completed

a doctoral dissertation on "The ecology of Testacea in a oligotrophic lake using the example Lake Stechlin" (*Die Ökologie der Testaceen im oligotrophen See, dargestellt am Beispiel des Großen Stechlinsees*), receiving a doctorate from the Friedrich Schiller University Jena in 1962. Yet his interest was not limited to the ecology of protozoa, as he showed in 1968 with his habilitation treatise entitled "The structure of a stratocenosis. Studies of the colonization of the herb layer in the forests around the lake Großen Stechlinsee" (*Der Aufbau der Stratozönose. Untersuchungen über die Besiedlung der Krautschicht in den Wäldern um den Großen Stechlinsee*), which he submitted to the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg.

In the 70ths, the Limnological Research Centre and the Limnological Laboratory Stechlin became affiliated with the Central Institute for Microbiology and Experimental Therapy of Academy of Sciences of GDR (*Zentralinstitut für Mikrobiologie und Experimentelle Therapie der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR, ZIMET*) in Jena. In the course of this, the main focus of Schönborn's research changed from standing waters to flowing waters. The topics in which he was engaged at this time included the significance of spatial structures and the role of the microbenthos in the mass and energy balance of the river Saale.

The restrictions of the GDR regime meant that academic exchange with colleagues from Western countries was not allowed. Wilfried Schönborn, however, did not allow himself to be exploited. He maintained contact with colleagues from the Western countries through the limited possibilities available.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 led to a new organization of the research landscape. Thanks to his commitment, a part of the Department for Specific Limnology became affiliated with the Institute for Ecology at the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, enabling the students of the university for the first time to have a limnology focus in their studies. From 1993 until his retirement, he was head of the Working Group for Limnology. Under his leadership, fundamental as well as applied research projects were carried out, and a number of theses and dissertations were completed as a result.

Schönborn ensured the continued existence of the working group, and in 1998, he went into his well-deserved retirement. His commitment to limnology continued even after his retirement. At any time, he answered questions, looked through the microscope and helped others with his comprehensive knowledge.

From 1992 to 2004, Schönborn was the editor of the journal *Limnologia*, founded in 1962, which was a basis for researchers in the GDR to have an exchange of knowledge in the literature with colleagues from the West. The journal has been represented in the Web of Science since 2002.

Since 1994, he was a full member of the Academy of Sciences in Erfurt (*Akademie gemeinnütziger Wissenschaften zu Erfurt*), and from 2001 to 2015, he was Secretary of the Mathematical and Natural Science Group.

Schönborn had an extensive publication list. Two of his most well-known books, belonging to the standard works of German-speaking limnologists, are “Flowing Water Biology” (*Fließgewässerbiologie*, 1999) and “Textbook of Limnology” (*Lehrbuch der Limnologie*, 2002). In 2013, a new edition of the textbook of Limnology was published.

Wilfried Schönborn was married to Ilse Schönborn, and they are the parents of the biologist Christoph Schönborn. Wilfried and Ilse Schönborn lived for and with nature. An example of this is their many years of observations of the animals in their own garden, which Wilfried Schönborn published in 2012 after the death of his wife and which represent an eldorado for nature lovers and behavioural biologists.

His academic career was difficult and characterized by political regimentation and restructuring. Wilfried Schönborn worked to establish truth, with strong commitment and without time constraints. Work-life balance was not an issue for him: his life was the scientific work.

His colleagues, students and friends as well as the entire academic community will always remember Wilfried Schönborn for his commitment as well as his groundbreaking research.

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