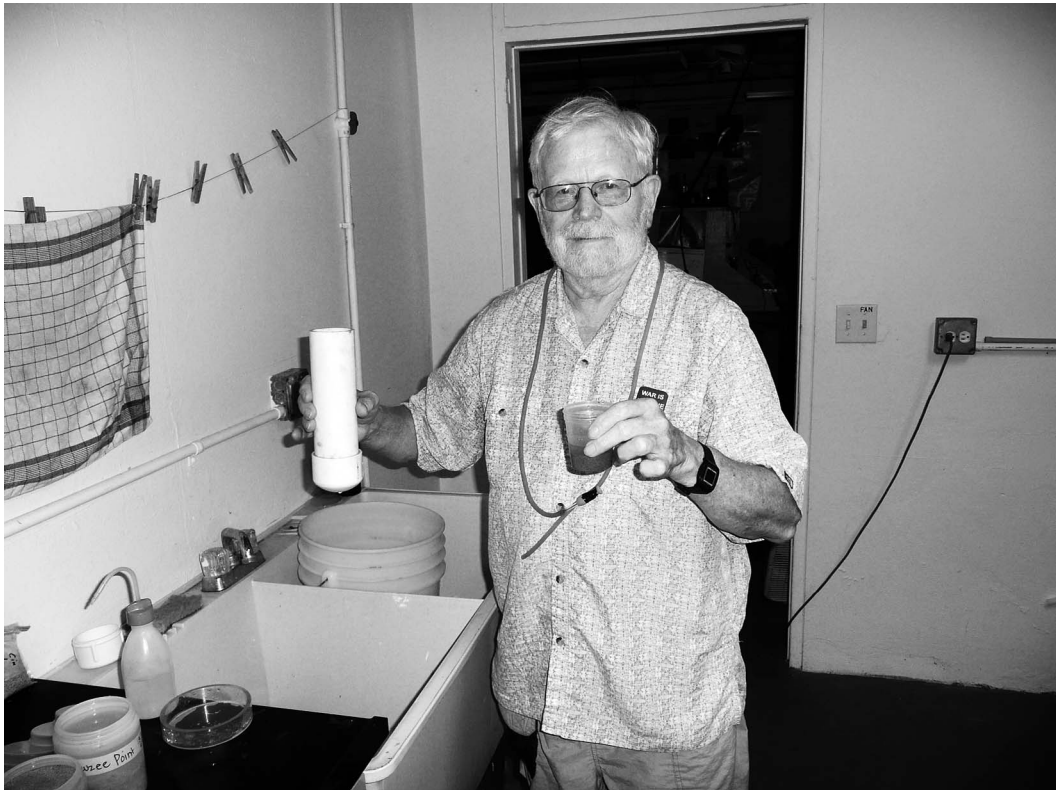


## A Tribute to William Hummon – Gastrotrich Biologist *Extraordinaire*

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Not since the great Adolf Remane in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century has there been a more influential researcher in gastrotrich systematics than William Dale “Bill” Hummon. Bill earned his Ph.D. in Zoology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in 1969, where he performed foundational research on the marine gastrotrichs of New England: Distributional ecology of marine interstitial Gastrotricha from Woods Hole, Massachusetts, with taxonomic comments on previously

described species. His Ph.D. research was the beginning of a life-long dedication to Gastrotricha, that enigmatic group of beautiful, meiofaunal invertebrates that have captured the attention of zoologists worldwide, and continue to inspire scientists in their quests to understand some of the greatest mysteries of animal evolution. Bill went on to become an inspiring professor of marine biology and zoology at Ohio University, Athens in 1969 (until 2002), and during his tenure participated in several international fellowships and scholarships across

England, Scotland, and Egypt. Bill's impact on the discipline grew with each passing year, having supervised 11 M.S. students, two Ph.D. students, 3 postdoctoral researchers, and producing 110 publications on ecology, ecotoxicology, morphology, taxonomy and the philosophy of science. Over the course of 43 illustrious years, he worked with gastrotrichs, copepods, crayfish, insects, rotifers, and tardigrades, and described 2 families, 6 genera, and 105 species along the way. Bill's focus on marine Gastrotricha allowed him the rare (and envious) opportunity to travel across some of the most historic and beautiful coastal landscapes of the Azores, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Poland, Portugal, the United Kingdom, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. And while his quest to understand gastrotrichs almost always had a global component, this did not mean he ignored his own backyard. Bill's research on the meiofauna of the east and west coasts of the United States remains some of his most influential taxonomic work on the phylum, and even included studies of the effects of pollutants, such as DDT and mine acids, on freshwater gastrotrichs. But whether Bill was traversing the USA in his mobile lab (his vehicle full of portable microscopes and equipment) or traveling across vast oceans and seas, he always kept one eye on the sand and one eye on the microscope.

Bill's importance to gastrotrich research went well beyond his influential publications on ecology and systematics. He also highlighted the very real and very practical problem of conserving type specimens for natural history museums, which is nothing short of impossible when dealing with soft-bodied meiofauna. Bill's hand-drawn illustrations of species always made identification relatively easy for the uninitiated, but without good physical specimens in museum collections, one could never be sure if the animal found on one beach was the same as that on another. Nowadays, molecular sequencing is the preferred choice for species synonymy (and differentiation),

but this requires a dedicated lab, skills, and most importantly, funding, which can be in short supply for those who work on meiofauna. Bill's solution to this dilemma predated the molecular revolution and in fact was much simpler, and importantly, globally accessible via the Internet. He provided the first video recording (SVHS format) of a new taxon, *Prostobuccantia broca* Evans & Hummon, 1991, which was deposited in the National Museum of Natural History, Washington, DC (USNM 235577). Since then, Bill has made innumerable video recordings (in digital format) of new and known species from across the globe, and provided his followers hours (and gigabytes) of video data, photographic images, GPS coordinates, maps, and taxon lists that remain as influential as any DNA barcode. Originally posted on a dedicated server, Bill's works are now part of the Gastrotricha World Portal (<http://www.gastrotricha.unimore.it/moviegallery.htm>).

Bill's influence on our scientific understanding and appreciation of Gastrotricha cannot be overstated. He inspired scientists across the globe, many of whom have never had the chance to meet this extraordinary man, yet will continue to learn from him well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. Bill's legacy will live on the annals of scientific discovery, and in the fond memories of those who knew him and will never forget. We are pleased to dedicate this special collection of gastrotrich publications to his memory.

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