

Michael Harbour Thurston (1937–2025)

Deep-sea biologist, taxonomist, mentor, and friend.



Michael Thurston, Emeritus Fellow at the National Oceanography Centre (NOC), a respected oceanographer and world authority on deep-sea amphipods, passed away on 31 December 2025 at the age of 88. He was internationally recognised as a leading authority on deep-sea amphipods and a pioneer in benthic biology.

Born on 18 July 1937 in Southgate, North London and educated at Minchenden Grammar School, he developed an interest in science that led him to University College London, where he graduated in 1959 with a BSc in Zoology. It was during his student years that Mike's fascination with amphipods began—a passion that would define his career.

After university, Mike joined the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey (later British Antarctic Survey) as a biologist, overwintering in Antarctica for two years from 1959 and returning to the UK in 1961. These [experiences](#) instilled in him a taste for exploration and resilience in extreme environments. From 1965 until 1968 he worked at the British Museum (Natural History) as a Junior Research Fellow, focusing on Antarctic amphipods and laying the foundation for his curatorial and taxonomic expertise and a lifelong interest in marine crustaceans.

In 1968, Mike embarked on a 29-year career at the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), later the Institute of Oceanographic Sciences (IOS) and Southampton Oceanography Centre (SOC). His work evolved from pelagic studies to benthic biology, and he became a leading figure in deep-sea research. Mike participated in numerous research expeditions and played a key role in major programmes investigating Atlantic deep-sea ecosystems. His meticulous studies of scavenging amphipods at abyssal depths revolutionised understanding of necrophagous communities and their ecological roles.

Mike's research focused on the taxonomy and ecology of deep-sea amphipods, particularly scavenging taxa. He described more than 75 new taxa, including one superfamily, two families, 13 genera, and 59 species (some remain in press). His name is commemorated in eight taxa, notably the genus *Thurstonella* and the family Thurstonellidae. He authored or co-authored more than 90 scientific papers and reports. His most recent works, even in his late eighties, included papers on revisions of amphipod genera and descriptions of new species from the Clarion-Clipperton Zone, Pacific Ocean and Atlantic abyssal plains, as well as editing key groups for the World Amphipoda Database. His dedication never waned; he continued publishing until 2025.

Beyond taxonomy, Mike contributed extensively to deep-sea ecology, participating in more than 50 research cruises and advancing knowledge of necrophagous communities and abyssal biodiversity. He was also deeply committed to the stewardship of biological collections. Following a major reorganisation at IOS in 1989, he assumed responsibility for the extensive Discovery Collections dating back to 1925, ensuring their preservation during the move to Southampton as well as overseeing transfers of a large part of the material to the Natural History Museum. Today, the Discovery Collections remain a vital resource for global deep-sea research.

Following his formal retirement in 1997, he remained active as an Honorary/Emeritus Research Fellow at NOC, publishing and mentoring until late 2025. Since 2001, Mike has collaborated closely with Dr. Tammy Horton, conducting research on scavenging amphipods at the Porcupine Abyssal Plain and inspiring a new generation of taxonomists.

Tammy recalls "Mike became my mentor when I first started at the NOC and over the last 24 years we have become not just colleagues but great friends. He was an excellent taxonomist and has taught me so much about amphipods and much more besides. His research legacy will live long in the amphipod literature, and I will continue to remember him particularly fondly as I carry on the research that we began together."

Away from amphipods, Mike was an enthusiastic birder and a long-time member of the British Trust for Ornithology. He was a passionate citizen scientist and conducted annual bird counts contributing to both local and national recording schemes. He recorded seabird and mammal sightings at sea and collected up dazed shearwaters that flew onto the ship at night, keeping them in boxes until releasing them the following morning. His sighting of an adult Ross's Gull with pink plumage far from home will never be forgotten by those who saw it. At home with his late wife Ann, he created an impressive garden, and was an enthusiastic supporter of amateur dramatics, especially the Coarse Acting Festivals held at the Redgrave Theatre in Farnham. He and Ann were passionate about the Surrey town that was their home for over half a century and campaigned (and protested) tirelessly against a development that eventually saw the demolition of the theatre they loved so much.

Mike will be greatly missed by all who knew him and worked with him. His legacy endures in the numerous species he described, the collections he safeguarded, and the new generations of scientists he inspired. He will be remembered not only for his scientific work but for his kindness, humility, and unwavering curiosity about the natural world.

Written by Tammy Horton, with contributions from Pam Talbot and Howard Roe.

An audio oral history recorded with Mike available [here](#):

<https://blogs.noc.ac.uk/jc278-pap-ocean-horizon/passing-torch-three-generations-amphipod-science-northeast-atlantic>

<https://blogs.noc.ac.uk/jc278-pap-ocean-horizon/forty-years-beneath-waves-remembering-dawn-deep-sea-science-porcupine>

Career Summary

1956-1959	BSc. (Special Zoology), Second Class Honours: University College, London
1959-1964	Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey/British Antarctic Survey: Biologist.
1965-1968	British Museum (Natural History): Junior Research Fellow.
1968-1972.	Senior Scientific Officer, National Institute of Oceanography (NIO).
1972-1995	Principal Scientific Officer, Institute of Oceanographic Sciences (IOS).
1995-1997	Principal Scientific Officer, Southampton Oceanography Centre (SOC).
1997-2025	Honorary Research Fellow, Southampton Oceanography Centre Honorary Research Fellow, then Emeritus Fellow, National Oceanography Centre (NOC)

Publications

1. Hendrycks, E.A. & Thurston, M.H. (2025) Two new species of *Vemana* Barnard, 1964 (Crustacea, Amphipoda, Vemanidae) from abyssal depths in the eastern tropical Atlantic Ocean. *Zootaxa*, 5653 (1), 97-115. <https://doi.org/10.11646/zootaxa.5653.1.5>
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- Vandepitte, L.; Vanhoorne, B.; Vonk, R.; White, K. N.; Zeidler, W. (2023). The World Amphipoda Database: history and progress. Records of the Australian Museum. 75(4): 329-342. <https://doi.org/10.3853/j.2201-4349.75.2023.1875>
3. Jazdzewska, A. M., Thurston M.H., Ziemkiewicz, A. (2020). Chapter 18. Amphipoda: distribution of deep-sea benthic Amphipoda along the NW Pacific. In: Saeedi, H. & Brandt, A. (eds) Biogeographic atlas of the deep NW Pacific fauna. Advanced Books. <https://doi.org/10.3897/ab.e51315>
 4. Horton, T., Thurston, M. H., Vlierboom, R., Gutteridge, Z., Pebody, C. A., Gates A.R., Bett, B.J. (2020). Are abyssal scavenging amphipod assemblages linked to climate cycles? Progress in Oceanography, 184. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pocean.2020.102318>
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 6. Horton, T., Cooper, H., Vlierboom, R., Thurston, M., Hauton, C., Young, C. Robert (2020). Molecular phylogenetics of deep-sea amphipods (*Eurythenes*) reveal a new undescribed species at the Porcupine Abyssal Plain, North East Atlantic Ocean. Progress in Oceanography, 183. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pocean.2020.102292>
 7. Ashford, O.S., Horton, T., Roterman, C.N., Thurston, M.H., Griffith, H.J., Brandt, A. (2019). A new Southern Ocean species in the remarkable and rare amphipod family Podosiridae (Crustacea: Amphipoda) questions existing systematic hypotheses, Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society, 190 (2), 613-631. <https://doi.org/10.1093/zoolinnean/zlz145>
 8. Thurston, M.H., Horton, T. (2019) Lepechinellidae, a valid amphipod family name (Crustacea, Amphipoda). Zootaxa 4706 (4): 598-599. <https://doi.org/10.11646/zootaxa.4706.4.10>
 9. Horton, T., Thurston, M.H., Vlierboom, R., Gates, A., Bett, B. (2017). Time-series observations of scavenging Amphipoda in the abyss. Biodiversity Journal 8 (2) 445-447.
 10. Duffy, G.A., Gutteridge, Z.R.S., Thurston, M.H., Horton, T. (2016). A comparative analysis of canyon and non-canyon populations of the deep-sea scavenging amphipod *Paralicella caperesca*. Journal of the Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom, 96 (8), 1687-1699. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025315415002064>
 11. Horton, T., Thurston, M. H. (2015). A revision of the genus *Paracallisoma* Chevreux, 1903 (Crustacea: Amphipoda: Scopelocheiridae: Paracallisominae) with a redescription of the type species of the genus *Paracallisoma* Chevreux, 1903, the description of two new genera and two new species from the Atlantic Ocean. Zootaxa. 3995 (1) 91-132. <https://doi.org/10.11646/zootaxa.3995.1.12>
 12. Coleman, C.O., Thurston, M. H. (2014). A redescription of the type species of *Oedicerina* Stephensen, 1931 (Crustacea, Amphipoda, Oedicerotidae) and the description of two new species. Zoosystematics and Evolution, 90 (2), 225-247. <https://doi.org/10.3897/zse90.8559>
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17. Horton, T., Thurston, M.H. (2011). *Centromedon zoe* (Crustacea: Amphipoda: Lysianassoidea), a new deep-water scavenger species from the North Atlantic, with a key to the genus *Centromedon*. *Zootaxa*, 2869, 54-62. <http://www.mapress.com/zootaxa/2011/f/zt02869p062.pdf>
18. Horton, T., Thurston, M.H. (2009). *Hirondellea sindhusagar* (Crustacea: Amphipoda: Lysianassoidea), a new deepwater scavenger species from the Indian Ocean, with a key to the genus *Hirondellea*. *Zootaxa* 2096: 433-441. In: Brökeland, W. & George, K.H. (eds) (2009) Deep-sea taxonomy - a contribution to our knowledge of biodiversity. *Zootaxa*, 2096, 1-488. <http://www.mapress.com/zootaxa/2009/f/zt02096p441.pdf>
19. Collins, M.A., Shreeve, R.S., Fielding, S., Thurston, M.H. (2008). Distribution, growth, diet and foraging behaviour of the yellow-fin notothen *Patagonotothen guntheri* (Norman) on the Shag Rocks Shelf (Southern Ocean). *Journal of Fish Biology*, 72 (1), 271-286. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1095-8649.2007.01711.x>
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23. Olabarria, C., Thurston, M.H. (2003). Latitudinal and bathymetric trends in body size of the deep-sea gastropod *Troschelia berniciensis* (King). *Marine Biology*, 143, 723-730. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00227-003-1116-6>
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27. Collins, Martin A., Yau, Cynthia, Allcock, Louise, Thurston, M.H. (2001). Distribution of deep-water benthic and benthopelagic cephalopods from the north-east Atlantic. *Journal*

of the Marine Biological Association of the U.K., 81 (1), 105-117.

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29. Thurston, M. (2000). Benthic Gammaridea (Crustacea: Amphipoda) in the deep sea (paper presented at 10th International Colloquium on Amphipoda, Alpha Taxonomy Workshop, Heraklion, Crete, 16-21 April 2000). *Polskie Archiwum Hydrobiologii*, 47, 353-377.
30. Thurston, M.H., Rice, A.L. Bett, B.J. (1998). Latitudinal variation in invertebrate megafaunal abundance and biomass in the North Atlantic Ocean abyss. *Deep Sea Research II*, 45 (1-3), 203-224. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0967-0645\(97\)00077-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0967-0645(97)00077-5)
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Taxa named in honour of Michael Thurston:

Eurythenes thurstoni Stoddart & Lowry, 2004

Gondogeneia thurstoni Alonso, 1989

Hirondellea thurstoni Kilgallen, 2014

Jassa thurstoni Conlan, 1990

Vibilia thurstoni Zeidler, 2003

Thurstonella Lowry & Zeidler, 2008

Thurstonella chelata (K.H. Barnard, 1931)

Thurstonellidae Lowry & Zeidler, 2008

Taxa named by Michael Thurston (alphabetically by family, original combination):

FAMILY	RANK	TAXON	AUTHORITY
AMPHILOCHIDAE		<i>Gitanopsis alvina</i>	Bellan-Santini & Thurston, 1996
CALLIOPIIDAE	Genus	<i>Lopyastis</i>	Thurston, 1974
	Genus	<i>Tylosapis</i>	Thurston, 1974
		<i>Bouvierella curtirama</i>	Bellan-Santini & Thurston, 1996
		<i>Oradarea acuminata</i>	Thurston, 1974
		<i>Oradarea ocellata</i>	Thurston, 1974
		<i>Oradarea rossi</i>	Thurston, 1974
		<i>Oradarea unidentata</i>	Thurston, 1974
CEBOCARIDAE		<i>Crybelocephalus birsteini</i>	Thurston, 1976
CHEIDAE	Family	Cheidae	Thurston, 1982
	Genus	<i>Cheus</i>	Thurston, 1982
		<i>Cheus annae</i>	Thurston, 1982
CYCLOCARIDAE		<i>Cyclocaris franki</i>	Horton & Thurston, 2014
		<i>Cyclocaris lowryi</i>	Horton & Thurston, 2014
DEXAMINIDAE		<i>Polycheria acanthopoda</i>	Thurston, 1974
		<i>Polycheria antarctica acanthopoda</i>	Thurston, 1974
DIDYMOCHELIIDAE	Genus	<i>Apodidymochelia</i>	Thurston, 1997
		<i>Apodidymochelia castellata</i>	Thurston, 1997
		<i>Rhachotropis arii</i>	Thurston, 1980
EUSIRIDAE		<i>Rhachotropis gislui</i>	Thurston, 1980
		<i>Rhachotropis thordisae</i>	Thurston, 1980
		<i>Rhachotropis thorkelli</i>	Thurston, 1980
		<i>Hirondellea namarensis</i>	Horton & Thurston, 2013

		<i>Hirondellea sindhusagar</i>	Horton & Thurston, 2009
IPHIMEDIIDAE		<i>Gnathiphimedia barnardi</i>	Thurston, 1974
		<i>Gnathiphimedia fuchsi</i>	Thurston, 1974
ISCHYROCERIDAE		<i>Ischyrocerus camptonyx</i>	Thurston, 1974
LEPECHINELLIDAE	Genus	<i>Lepechinelloides</i>	Thurston, 1980
		<i>Lepechinella grimi</i>	Thurston, 1980
		<i>Lepechinella helgii</i>	Thurston, 1980
		<i>Lepechinella skarphedini</i>	Thurston, 1980
		<i>Lepechinelloides kari</i>	Thurston, 1980
LILJEBORGIIDAE		<i>Liljeborgia (Liljeborgiella) eurycradus</i>	Thurston, 1974
OEDICEROTIDAE		<i>Oedicerina loerzae</i>	Coleman & Thurston, 2014
		<i>Oedicerina vaderi</i>	Coleman & Thurston, 2014
PARAMELITIDAE		<i>Paramelita barnardi</i>	Thurston, 1973
PARDALISCIDAE		<i>Halicoides discoveryi</i>	Thurston, 1976
PHOTIDAE		<i>Gammaropsis (Gammaropsis) bennetti</i>	Thurston, 1974
PHOXOCEPHALOPSIDAE	Genus	<i>Eophoxocephalopsis</i>	Thurston, 1989
		<i>Eophoxocephalopsis rhachianensis</i>	Thurston, 1989
PLEUSTIDAE		<i>Atylopsis orthodactylus</i>	Thurston, 1974
		<i>Atylopsis signiensis</i>	Thurston, 1974
PODOSIRIDAE		<i>Acutocoxae ogilvieae</i>	Horton, Ashford & Thurston in Ashford, Horton, Roterman, Thurston, Griffiths & Brandt, 2019
PONTOGENEIIDAE	Genus	<i>Antarctogeneia</i>	Thurston, 1974
	Genus	<i>Luckia</i>	Bellan-Santini & Thurston, 1996
		<i>Antarctogeneia macrodactyla</i>	Thurston, 1974
		<i>Luckia striki</i>	Bellan-Santini & Thurston, 1996
		<i>Paramoera hurleyi</i>	Thurston, 1974
		<i>Paramoera husvikensis</i>	Thurston, 1974
		<i>Pontogeneia redfearni</i>	Thurston, 1974
		<i>Schraderia barnardi</i>	Thurston, 1974
		<i>Schraderia dubia</i>	Thurston, 1974
SCINIDAE		<i>Scina wagleri atlantis</i>	Thurston, 1976
SCOPELOCHEIRIDAE	Genus	<i>Haptocallisoma</i>	Horton & Thurston, 2015
	Genus	<i>Pseudocallisoma</i>	Horton & Thurston, 2015
		<i>Haptocallisoma lemarete</i>	Horton & Thurston, 2015
		<i>Paracallisoma idioxenos</i>	Horton & Thurston, 2015
SEBIDAE		<i>Seba stoningtonensis</i>	Thurston, 1974
STEGOCEPHALIDAE		<i>Steleuthera ecoprophycea</i>	Bellan-Santini & Thurston, 1996
TRYPHOSIDAE	Genus	<i>Claudedebeella</i>	Thurston & Horton, 2020
		<i>Cheirimedon similis</i>	Thurston, 1974
		<i>Orchomene schellenbergi</i>	Thurston, 1972
		<i>Orchomene tabarini</i>	Thurston, 1972
		<i>Tryphosella marri</i>	Thurston, 1974
URISTIDAE		<i>Centromedon zoe</i>	Horton & Thurston, 2011
VALETTIDAE		<i>Valettia hystrix</i>	Thurston, 1989
VALETTIOPSIDAE	Genus	<i>Valettietta</i>	Lincoln & Thurston, 1983
		<i>Valettietta gracilis</i>	Lincoln & Thurston, 1983
		<i>Valettietta lobata</i>	Lincoln & Thurston, 1983
VEMANIDAE		<i>Vemana cuspidata</i>	Hendrycks & Thurston, 2025
		<i>Vemana hortoniae</i>	Hendrycks & Thurston, 2025

