

# PIONEERING MARINE BIOLOGY IN HONG KONG



**EMERITUS PROF. BRIAN MORTON**  
Emeritus Professor of Marine Ecology, HKU

## Major Achievements

- Founding Chairman of the Marine Biological Association of Hong Kong
- Founding Editor of Asian Marine Biology
- Former Chairman of the Marine Parks and Reserves Committee
- Founding Member (in 1981) and life member of WWFHK
- Sole recipient of the Duke of Edinburgh Conservation Gold Medal (2004)
- Officer in the Order of the British Empire (OBE) by HRH Queen Elizabeth (1999)
- Knight (Ridder) in the Order of the Golden Ark by Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands (1997)
- Honorary Life Fellow of the Pacific Science Association (1993)
- Honorary Life Member of the Malacological Society of London (1992)

A few decades ago, there was merely a nimble team for marine biology; Professor Brian MORTON pioneered to bring this discipline to Hong Kong and now here in HKU, there are a variety of undergraduate marine programmes. Professor Morton devoted to marine biology and was the first to teach marine biology in Hong Kong. He initiated the building of The Swire Institute of Marine Science (SWIMS), the first and biggest marine biology laboratory in Hong Kong. Both in teaching or research, Professor Morton shared that one had to be totally committed in order to pursue a career in this field.

“By asking questions, one can be inspired to think.”

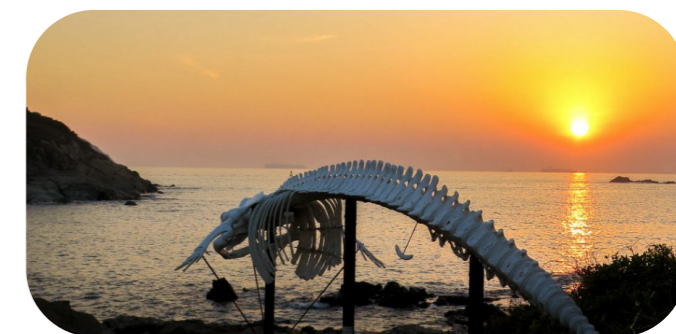


Being marine biologists may face many challenges in reality, yet Professor Morton was optimistic in a way that he believed marine biologist can help making reclamation proposal as least destructive as possible. For example, they can change the pattern of water circulation, and model the effect based on existing information. In Hong Kong government's endeavours of recreating shorelines, Professor Morton had helped the Hong Kong biologists to improve the fabric of reclamations, so they could function as natural shorelines. Altogether, Professor Morton had given expert views on how marine biologists were a vital part of maintaining the ecosystem of a region, so that it could reduce the effect of destructive constructions.

Professor Morton mentioned that the marine environment of Hong Kong was very unique within the context of both mainland China and the Southeast Asia. In his book *Seashore ecology of Hong Kong*, he had elaborated his point based on geology, hydrology, qualities with the Pearl River in the west and oceanic water in the east. The seashore of Hong Kong was a highly dynamic place and was extraordinary rich in marine life. Much more so than anywhere else in China.

Being a teacher, Professor Morton stimulated students' learning by being upright, critical, and by asking questions that inspired students to think. He stressed that students need to be highly skilled and dedicated in the pursuit of marine biology, which involved a wide range of applied aspects such as fisheries, pollution, marine mammals, and plastic pollution in the ocean.

Throughout his 34 years of teaching, Professor Morton's most treasured memory remained as the building and opening of SWIMS, through which he wished to tackle problems of Hong Kong with regards to the sea: sewage, rubbish coming from local domestic source and flow from China. Through SWIMS, marine biologists could give government independent advice, and publish research for international community to compare their data with our data. Since the sea was continuant and connected within nations, Professor Morton visualised international cooperation, which was vital for studying the problems of the sea in a more connected way.



To nurture young scientists, Professor Morton set up a trust fund, with a wish to fund academic exchanges. While HKU students had a lot of opportunities to go overseas, Professor Morton highlighted that one must be open-minded in order to be a good exchange student. It was the willingness to accommodate that made the difference in learning.

Professor Morton's insight in teaching and commitment in marine biology made him a highly regarded member of HKU.

## STUDENT REPORTER

“What Professor Morton did is highly admirable - he brought marine science to Hong Kong, and inspired many other students to pursue marine biology here. His passion for his field of research is something we all can learn from. Such contribution to the field is only possible through his dedication to his work.”



**Kaman Lee, BSc Student**  
(major in Chemistry, minor in Global Studies)