PATRICIA YAP

has been with SeaLifeBase since its inception in 2005.

Before joining the initial three-people team, while she was doing her undergrad at the University of the Philippines, Los Baños, Pat worked at the WorldFish Center doing literature reviews for coastal management initiatives and training activities. FishBase was in the same building so she was able to connect with their team and become familiar with the work they do.

After graduating, she left and worked in the field for a year, then came back after one of her previous bosses told her about FishBase’s new sister project, which would focus on non-fish marine life. She knew she had to join.

“Just the thought of reading about different marine animals every day, and being able to provide the data I read to a bigger audience was a wonderful opportunity,” she said. “I believe there is a huge difference between seeing marine life (when you snorkel or dive), and knowing about marine life. It’s like taking a peek into their life and the environment they live in and trying to tell their story. That’s what I wanted to share with the world by being a part of SeaLifeBase.”

As soon as she joined, Patricia was asked to choose the animal group that she loved the most. She chose marine mammals.

What followed was a training process that required adapting and changing the tables that are used in FishBase so that they would fit parameters relevant to non-fish marine organisms.

“My first encoding task was to completely exhaust all data from the FAO catalogue Marine Mammals of the World, which had distribution, ecology, length, common names, and synonym data. It was like an encoding practice while pumping up the data in SeaLifeBase,” Pat recalled. “Later on, I was assigned to be in charge of all vertebrate groups in addition to tunicates and nudibranchs. Eventually, our roles evolved and concentrated on specific data encoding/tables.”
As her position evolved, Patricia’s responsibilities grew. Just a few years after joining SeaLifeBase, she became the coordinator of all faunal projects, something she did while pursuing a master’s degree in environmental science and management.

As expected, the hard work and major efforts to balance out her professional, student, and personal life paid off and in 2013, she was promoted to research analyst, a role that she maintains to date.

“I still handle all faunal work projects in Quantitative Aquatics, involving both FishBase and SeaLifeBase. I try my best to complete the marine biodiversity of specific island ecosystem projects, provide mapping data that feeds into AquaMaps, and complete mandatory information for marine species. All of this is possible because of the team I have by my side.” she said.

For Patricia, the most rewarding part of working in SeaLifeBase is providing data to people, governments, agencies, and countries that need them to make informed decisions and protect their marine resources and environments.

Thinking about the future, she wishes that both SeaLifeBase and FishBase go on for eternity and that more people, including the academe, policymakers, scientists, and the wider audience, see the value of having these global databases available to them.
EMILY CAPULI: THREE DECADES AT FISHBASE

Emily Capuli says that when she started working for FishBase three decades ago, her hair was darker and longer.

She may look different now but her interest in documenting the fishes found globally has not changed a bit. She continues to do this by ‘fishing’ for new species and documenting taxonomic changes in FishBase. This is what Emily has been doing for the past 30 years.

The marine biologist joined the FishBase team right after completing her master’s degree at the University of the Philippines. Her goal was to do something different from the field and lab work she had been conducting during her studies.

“The first work I did for FishBase included documenting the fishes found in the Philippines and I still continue doing it now and find it very important to do for my country,” Capuli said. “Other than this, I enjoy working on the taxonomic aspect of FishBase, the development and creation of tools using the species data.”

From team leader to ‘theme’ leader

From research assistant at different levels, Emily became a senior research associate in 2003 thanks to the work she started doing with an increasing number of taxonomists, focusing on the development and evolution of the database.

“Rainer (Froese) called me a team leader then and after 30 years of working mainly on species taxonomy, I’m now called a ‘theme leader’ for taxonomy involved with FishBase and SeaLifeBase,” she said. “Come to think of it, the spelling of the title also evolved!”

For Emily, all projects she has worked on have been rewarding in one way or another but one of the things she has come to appreciate the most in her career is the mentorship she acquires from colleagues and other scientists on all-things FishBase/SeaLifeBase.
Learning more about marine life can be both a lifelong interest and a challenge. Emily believes there are hundreds of projects that can be done using the wealth of information in FishBase and SeaLifeBase but the key is finding the time, resources and people to carry them out.

“I really hope FishBase and SeaLifeBase go on forever and that we are succeeded by a ‘new species’ of dedicated people who will have new vision and foresight to sustain these Global Species Databases,” she said.

**Remember to have fun**

On the lighter side of things, Capuli has had fun getting to know all the different people that have been involved with the project throughout the years.

Informal settings, such as music jams held at Rainer Froese’s place ‘back in the day’ have been important team-building opportunities where Emily got to know people beyond the professional level and make lasting friends.

“I really hope FishBase and SeaLifeBase go on forever and that we are succeeded by a ‘new species’ of dedicated people who will have new vision and foresight to sustain the projects”
SUSAN LUNA, also known as Tuttay, has been with FishBase even before the project was born.

Back in 1989, she started working with Daniel Pauly at the International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management ICLARM, and as FishBase was being conceived, she was quickly recruited into the project.

Her job? Testing the database prototype being developed by Rainer Froese, which involved sending printed pages of complete encoded information from the database for different subjects such as species biology, morphology, distribution or countries via snail mail to Rainer in Kiel, Germany.

“When FishBase was finally launched as a project in 1990, I - together with another colleague from the Aquaculture Program at ICLARM, Belen Acosta - began working on the database,” Luna recalled.

After spending almost three decades as a researcher at FishBase, Tuttay - who studied Marine Science at the University of the Philippines - decided to switch gears. In 2018, she became an executive assistant at the recently-created Quantitative Aquatics, an organization that manages FishBase, SeaLifeBase and AquaMaps. At Q-quatics, she provides high-level support to the executive director, Mary Ann Bimbao, on all matters pertaining to administrative, human resources, and financial affairs.

The new role allows her to help address what she perceives to be the biggest challenge these legacy projects are facing nowadays: continuous research funding.

Susan believes that guaranteeing that these databases remain alive is very important for humanity’s growing knowledge of marine life.
“I hope that the legacy of FishBase and SeaLifeBase will continue long after we are gone and that provision for development and maintenance will always come,” she said. “I’m sure that the global scope of FishBase guarantees that work on this database will never cease as information and knowledge are continuously generated.”