



## Hank Bart (1956-Present)

Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology  
Tulane University

Director  
Tulane University Biodiversity Research  
Institute

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*"I think that with exposure, and the encouragement of family and the right mentors, more minorities will enter environmental fields." Hank Bart, 2006.*

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### Overview

Dr. Hank Bart is a professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at Tulane University, as well as the director of the Tulane University Biodiversity Research Institute. Bart's research focuses on the diversity of fishes; taxonomic diversity, ecological diversity, and diversity of environmental adaptation. Bart has led several initiatives to engage more minorities in STEM fields over the course of his career, and led numerous efforts to apply spatial analysis to his field. This includes leading the effort to digitize and records of the Royal D. Suttkus Fish Collection, directing the development of the GEOLocate Software Platform, and directing the Fishnet2 network of fish collection databases. Some of his selected publications include:

- Grace, M.A., M.H. Doosey, H. L. Bart and G. J. P. Naylor. 2015. First record of *Mollisquama* sp. (Chondrichthyes: Squaliformes: Dalatiidae) from the Gulf of Mexico, with a morphological comparison to the holotype description of *Mollisquama parini* Dolganov. *Zootaxa* (in press)
- Simon, Thomas P., Charles C. Morris, Bernard R. Kuhajda, Carter R. Gilbert, Henry L. Bart Jr, Nelson Rios, Paul M. Stewart, Thomas P. Simon IV, Mitt Denney. 2015. Fishes of the Choctawhatchee River System in Southeastern Alabama and Northcentral Florida. *Southeastern Fishes Council Proceedings* 01/2015; 55(1):1-54.
- Yu, Kai, Xin Dang, Henry Bart Jr. and Yixin Chen. 2014. Robust Model-based Learning via Spatial-EM Algorithm. *IEEE Transactions on Knowledge and Data Engineering*. DOI 10.1109/TKDE.2014.2373355.
- Schmidt, Ray C., Henry L. Bart Jr, Wanja D. Nyingi, Nathan N. Gichuki. 2014. Phylogeny of suckermouth catfishes (Mochokidae: Chiloglanis) from Kenya: the utility of Growth Hormone introns in species level phylogenies. *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* 79:415-421.
- Doosey, Michael H. and Henry L. Bart Jr. 2014. Buffalofishes. Pp 258-263, In: M. Eberle (Ed.), *Fishes of Kansas*. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, KS.

## Early Life and Education

In a career filled with accomplishments, Hank Bart cites two that he finds especially satisfying: fulfilling his “childhood dream” of a career in natural history and environmental biology, and doing it largely in his native New Orleans. As a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at Tulane University, Bart considers his work there the highlight of his career. “I never dreamed that I would be back here at a Louisiana institution that seemed off-limits to me while I was growing up here,” he says. “It’s a very elite institution here in the South, one that I would not have qualified for admission to while I was looking at colleges. So it was quite a thrill for me to get the opportunity to come back and work here, and it’s been a very good experience.”

The fourth of ten children born to Henry Bart Sr., a postal worker, and Corinne, a seamstress, Bart cannot remember a time when he was not interested in the natural world. Fishing with his father in marshes around New Orleans as a child solidified that interest. “Those trips with my dad instilled in me a love for the outdoors, and especially of fishing,” Bart recalls. He developed a special interest in marine biology—“patterned after Jacques Cousteau”—and pursued that field in college, graduating from the University of New Orleans with a Bachelor of Science in biology and an Master of Science in the same subject. He also held his first environmental job while in college, as a naturalist at the Louisiana Nature Center.

## Importance of Mentoring to Career

During this time, Bart met a significant mentor, Royal D. Suttikus - a well-known fish taxonomist he would later replace at Tulane. “I met him at a party,” he explains. “I had always been interested in marine biology, but when I found out that he was interested in freshwater fish, I volunteered for him. He later hired me for summer job, where I learned about ichthyology (fish biology), and decided to pursue that field.” Bart calls Suttikus his “academic grandfather.” Bart also credits one of Suttikus’s former students, Bob Cashner –Bart’s master’s thesis advisor at the University of New Orleans - as his “academic father.” “He’s just a really great mentor—he really worked with you, really helped you with things,” Bart says.

Bart left New Orleans in 1981 to pursue his Ph.D. in zoology at the University of Oklahoma. It was the first time he had really left the city, and he acknowledges that it was a hard change at first. “It was difficult...I had to learn a new and different culture, all while immersing myself in an intensive field program,” Bart remembers. “But I look back at it fondly now. I made good friends.” After earning his doctoral degree, Bart left Oklahoma for a visiting assistant professor and postdoctoral research associate position at the University of Illinois. He credits his postdoctoral advisor, Larry Page, then at the Illinois Natural History Survey, whom Bart refers to as his “academic big brother,” as a third important mentor early in his career.

## Career

After three years at the University of Illinois, Bart took a faculty position at Auburn University. But when he “got the opportunity to go back home” in 1992—Tulane offered him the faculty position vacated by Suttikus—Bart did not hesitate. He has been at Tulane ever since. “It’s gotten to the point where I’m doing everything an academic is supposed to do, everything that I have wanted to do,” he says. “I’m at the pinnacle of my career.” He serves as director of Tulane’s Biodiversity Research Institute, is involved in a

number of professional steering committees, and has several funded research grants. “It’s always been my passion. And it still is,” Bart states when asked why he has remained in the environmental field. “I wouldn’t describe any of my [career] journey as really bad. It’s all been very pleasurable.”

## **Mentoring Others**

All of Bart’s schools have been predominantly-white institutions, and throughout his academic career he has sought to strengthen on-campus networks and opportunities for minorities. Whether through serving on diversity committees, or creating a black faculty and staff caucus (Auburn University), Bart has increasingly focused on the objective of increasing minority strength and representation in the environmental sciences. “Since all of my schools were majority schools, I have worked to give minority students a sense of community,” he says. Since coming to Tulane, Bart has also taken on some broader initiatives to increase minority participation: since 1996, he has served as Tulane’s campus coordinator for the Louisiana Alliance for Minority Participation (LAMP), and also received a National Science Foundation grant to increase the number of minorities who ultimately pursue careers in academia.

Bart acknowledges that attracting minorities to the environmental field has been a difficult endeavor, largely because of existing perceptual barriers. “Minorities tend to be centered in urban areas, and don’t have a lot of experience with the environment,” he says. “They see environmental careers as not having much of a practical purpose, as being more recreational, and they have more practical considerations to think of.” However, Bart notes that the attitude often perceived as “minorities just don’t care about the environment” is a fallacy, and he’s been working to bridge the disconnect between simply enjoying the environment and considering the field as a career.

## **Advice to Young Professionals**

“For anyone who enjoys the outdoors or fishing—and most minorities I’ve met do—be very open to this area [as a career]”, he advises. He encourages minorities who are interested to study biology and get practical experience in the field, and he’s hopeful that his efforts will eventually make a lasting difference. “I think that with exposure, and encouragement of family and the right mentors, more minorities will enter environmental fields.”

## **For More Information**

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*This interview was conducted in 2015.*