

Hannelore Hoch *

Laudatio for Prof. PEGGY HILL, University of Oklahoma, Tulsa, USA
on the occasion of the award ceremony of the Insect Drummer Award 2013
on March 19th 2013 in Göttingen

The Insect Drummer Award committee has enthusiastically and unambiguously supported the nomination of Peggy Hill to receive this year's Insect Drummer Award.

It is a great honour and my personal pleasure to hold this laudatio for Peggy Hill.

Peggy's achievements and contributions to the field of vibrational communication are many, let me just briefly highlight a few.

Many years ago, when I first undertook my own studies on the vibrational communication of Hawaiian cave planthoppers, I remember that I attended a conference on communication in arthropods, very keenly expecting to learn more about the fascinating world of vibrations produced by small animals, hoping to establish collaboration with other colleagues in the field. How disappointed was I when there was hardly anyone interested in vibrational signals – 99% of the lectures given were on the various aspects of phonotaxis in grasshoppers! Vibrational communication was then largely neglected, even regarded a lateral arabesque of nature, and was certainly not in the focus of interest of the scientific mainstream. Since then, of course, things have changed. More and more organisms were found to use vibrations – ranging from tiny insects to large mammals – as their prime communication channel, and it was becoming increasingly evident that vibrational communication is of immense importance to transfer all sorts of information among individuals. What was still missing, however, was a unifying voice, a synthetic approach to the field of vibrational communication, and a common language for those eager to enter this field. What was needed was not only an expert in vibrational communication, but a personality with a broad background in systematics, evolutionary biology, and ecology, a personality with a genuine interest and broad overview in animals and their strategies for coping with the challenges of their environment. A good science writer on top, and somebody willing to undertake the task of unifying the manifold aspects of vibrational communication. – Like hardly any other, Peggy Hill combines all these properties. Her work on the vibrational communication in the prairie mole cricket, *Gryllotalpa major*, has become a classic and continues to be an inspiration for many students and scientists alike.

Peggy's own research background provided her with a deep insight into the complexity of vibrational communication and at the same time gave her the courage to tackle the enormous task of synthesizing existing knowledge on this communication channel and the animals utilizing it. The result is her book „Vibrational communication in animals“, published in 2008, which is not only a much acclaimed scholarly work, but also one which is easy and fun to read.

On her homepage, Peggy confides that working on the mating system of the prairie mole cricket has – original quote – „provided me with just enough answers to be able to ask questions in a dozen directions“. And this is exactly what her book is now doing for all those interested in this fascinating field of animal behaviour: provide a starting point for research in dozens of directions.

The engine that drives Peggy's work is „sacred curiosity“, the desire to know more, to find out, to add another piece to the puzzle of nature, combined with a deep appreciation of the natural world. Consequently much of her research provides knowledge which will promote the conservation of her study objects and their habitats. Peggy is one of the diminishing number of researchers who know that science is not about the maniac striving to produce high numbers of high-impact publications, *she* knows that science is – in the very first place – about taking on responsibility for what we are doing and why we are doing it.

What more can I say? Peggy Hill is by all means a true leader. And she is most deserving of the Insect Drummer Award 2013. My cordial congratulations to you, Peggy!

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