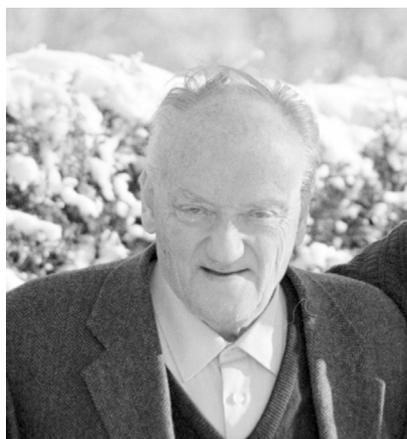




Robert Thorn

1925-2012



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We learned with sadness of the passing of Robert Thorn, who died in late November at the age of 87. Mr. Thorn was a trailblazing figure for all of us, the first to describe and illustrate how to keep Urodeles in captivity in his milestone book «Les Salamandres», published in 1968, which was for decades the bible for many of us. Born in 1925 in Luxembourg, he grew up in upper-class surroundings until the age of 17, when he was sent to Silesia with his mother in 1942 during the German occupation. He made his way back in 1945, but the episode marked his entire life. His wife, Agnes, recalled that in his youth his family struggled to use the bathroom sink because it was full of newts he had captured. That passion for newts and salamanders never left him. When we met him in 1980, he still had dozens of species in his home in Luxembourg, from the garage to the attic, kept in aquariums and aquaterrariums of all sizes, equipped with ferns, mosses, rocks, landscapes that reproduced each species' habitat. It was a magnificent sight. In his earlier years he was able to observe many species in their native environments during weeks-long stops at ports around the world, from the Americas to Africa to India to Europe, when he was an officer in the Belgian merchant marine. At the age of 57, he took early retirement from the Arbet steelworks, where he worked from 1955 to 1982, giving him more free time to observe salamanders in captivity, which he did passionately for more than 20 years, until his health began to decline. Named a scientific collaborator of the National Museum of Natural History in Luxembourg in 1982, winner of the national prize for natural heritage and the environment in 1999, decorated with the red medal for extraordinary service to the nation in 2004 for his knowledge and his efforts to protect his country's amphibians, Robert Thorn was deeply appreciated not only in Luxembourg but across Europe, in the United States, in Russia, and in China. His love and respect for nature were matched by a remarkable gentleness and humility. He would watch a Palmate Newt courtship display with admiration, and was humbled by nature, which he venerated more than the statements and hypocrisy of humankind. So long, old friend.

The FUG team