

## On the retirement of Peter Deplazes

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**At the end of January 2022, Peter Deplazes retires as Director of the Institute of Parasitology (Vetsuisse and Medical Faculty, University of Zurich). On this occasion, we would like to briefly present his career and pay tribute to his work and Peter, the person.**

Peter Deplazes grew up in a large family in the Grisons Oberland (Surselva) with Rhaeto-Romance as his mother tongue. He completed an apprenticeship as a civil engineering draughtsman in the distant cantonal capital of Chur, which is not an easy place for people from the Oberland. He then felt more comfortable in the big city of Zurich, where he completed his Matura and then his studies in veterinary medicine. Even as a student, he was associated with the Institute of Parasitology (IPZ) as an animal keeper's assistant. In his dissertation at the IPZ, under the supervision of the then director Prof. Johannes Eckert, he dealt with cestodes (tapeworms), a group of parasites that formed a focus of his research throughout his professional career. Peter Deplazes became an assistant in the group of Prof. Bruno Gottstein, the later and now retired director of the Institute of Parasitology at the University of Bern. With a grant from the Swiss National Science Foundation, Peter Deplazes spent a research period at the Institute for Molecular Genetics and Animal Diseases (School of Veterinary Studies, Murdoch University, Western Australia) in 1991/92. During this intensive research period he learned modern concepts and methods of immunology, and he established contacts 'down under' that lasted throughout his research life (Prof. Andrew Thompson, Prof. Nick Smith). Finally, he became head of the working group 'Immuno- and Molecular Diagnostics' at the IPZ as senior assistant, and he habilitated in February 1997 on the topic of immunology and molecular diagnosis of cestodes.

In August of the same year, J. Eckert retired. He had built up the IPZ since its foundation in 1968 as a dual institute of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and the Faculty of Medicine and had developed it into an internationally respected research institution. For various reasons (austerity measures, restructuring), the procedure to fill the chair was suspended, and Prof. Peter Köhler, head of the IPZ's "Biochemical and Molecular Parasitology" working group, was elected director ad interim. During this interregnum, Peter Deplazes, as a veterinarian, has essentially assumed responsibility for the relevant aspects of research, teaching, continuing education, and

service. After resumption of the appointment procedure to succeed J. Eckert, Peter Deplazes was appointed full professor and director of the IPZ as of August 2000. The interruption of the appointment procedure has subsequently proved to be a great stroke of luck for the Institute and the University of Zurich!

The first years of Peter Deplazes' term of office were marked by the turbulence surrounding the reorganisation of the two veterinary faculties in Bern and Zurich. In one of the variants under consideration, the IPZ would have disappeared! In 2006, it was finally decided to merge the two faculties to form the 'Vetsuisse Faculty', with both locations remaining full faculties. Regardless of these external disruptive factors, Peter Deplazes shaped and expanded the IPZ from the very beginning. One expression of this is that in the 2002 annual report, the organisation chart showed only one group, 'Research', in addition to the secretariat and the 'Diagnostic Centre for Parasitology' (headed by Dr. Felix Grimm). Research was then increasingly carried out by independent but interlinked groups. In 2012, three groups were listed ('Medical and Veterinary Parasitology', 'Molecular Parasitology', 'Vector Entomology'), currently there are the six groups 'Zoonoses and Translational Research' (Peter Deplazes), 'Molecular Parasitology' (Adrian Hehl), 'Vector Entomology' (Alexander Mathis), 'Veterinary Parasitology' (Manuela Schnyder), 'Nematode-Host Interaction' (Lucienne Tritten, SNF Ambizione) and 'Biomedical Parasitology' (Ramon Eichenberger, SNF Ambizione). All these groups have ongoing, competitively acquired third-party funding.

In research, Peter Deplazes continued the topic of echinococcosis, which his predecessor J. Eckert had established and led, but expanded it substantially and interdisciplinarily. Thus, in collaboration with the ecologist and wildlife biologist Dr. Dani Hegglin, he pioneered the characterisation of the ecology of parasite transmission in urban areas, and he carried out mathematical modelling and risk analyses with the epidemiologist Prof. Paul Torgerson. Today, this

research would be described with the modern term 'EcoHealth'. For Peter Deplazes, however, it is a special concern that the research findings are also implemented. Accordingly, the term 'translational' has appeared in the name of his research group since 2014. He has contributed to analysing the situation regarding parasitoses in various countries, also with his own arduous field work, and to developing and implementing concrete solutions to combat them. These countries include Kyrgyzstan, Bhutan, where he spent one of his sabbaticals, and Cape Verde, where he was still active in this regard last October.

Peter Deplazes' research has received extensive financial support from the SNSF and foreign research institutions, the University of Zurich, foundations, federal offices, and industry. Just under half of Peter Deplazes' extensive scientific work concerns tapeworms (*Echinococcus* spp., *Taenia* spp.). In addition, he has made contributions on the entire spectrum of parasites. Thus, 11 taxa of protozoa appear in the titles of his publications, with emphasis on *Leishmania* spp., *Toxoplasma gondii* and Microsporidia. The latter, which are now classified as fungi, emerged as new pathogens during the HIV pandemic. In close collaboration with Prof. Rainer Weber from the University Hospital Zurich (USZ), Peter Deplazes has researched essential aspects of these pathogens and their zoonotic significance. In addition to tapeworms, Peter Deplazes has published on 14 taxa of other worms (nematodes, trematodes), and he has even made some contributions to the third group of parasites, the arthropods (on mange mites and ticks). As imposing as the spectrum of parasites studied and the hosts involved (humans, domestic, farm, zoo, and wild animals) is, as imposing is the methodological repertoire, from basic to problem-oriented research (incl. clinic, therapy, diagnostics), from laboratory/field studies to in silico analyses. Such a workload cannot be mastered without broad-based knowledge, tremendous enthusiasm for research and tireless dedication. In 2017, he was awarded the 'Award for Excellence in Research' by the World Association for the Advancement of Veterinary Parasitology (WAAVP).

Peter Deplazes is also a constant driver of the further development of parasitological diagnostics. After taking office, he concentrated the diagnostic tasks of the IPZ, which had previously been divided among various working groups, in the 'Diagnostic Centre Parasitology' (DZP). Under the leadership of Dr. F. Grimm, the DZP has developed continuously since its foundation in 2000. The constant transfer of results from Peter Deplazes' research projects into the mundane world of diagnostics and his enthusiasm for interesting and unusual diagnostic questions have contributed significantly to this.

Peter Deplazes has had a significant influence on the teaching of parasitology in the German-speaking world through his contributions to the pocket textbook 'Medizinische Parasitologie' (as successor to J.

Eckert), and to the textbook 'Parasitologie für die Tiermedizin' (also available as English version 'Parasitology for Veterinary Medicine'), for which he took on the time-consuming role of coordinator from J. Eckert for the 4th edition (other authors of this textbook are Profs. Anja Joachim, Alexander Mathis, Christina Strube, Anja Taubert, Georg von Samson-Himmelstjerna and Horst Zahner).

His teaching at the University of Zurich and other universities was not characterised by sentences ready to print, but by his great knowledge and commitment as well as his enthusiasm for his field. This was honoured in 2021: He received, 'in recognition of his innovative and high-quality teaching', the lecturer award of the Vetsuisse Faculty Zurich, for which he was nominated by the students. Peter Deplazes was enormously pleased about this award.

He has also been strongly committed to the interests of veterinary parasitology outside the university. He was a member of the board of parasitological societies and a member of foundation boards. As a founding member of the European Veterinary Parasitology College (EVPC) and ESCCAP (European Scientific Counsel Companion Animal Parasites), Peter Deplazes has contributed significantly to the dissemination of parasite expertise in the professional world and in practice.

In his function as a full professor at UZH, he was a member of countless commissions. His participation in the Faculty Research Committee and the University Ethics Committee deserve special mention. He was also a sought-after expert for national authorities and international organisations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA).

Peter Deplazes led the IPZ with a cooperative management style, also characterised by his calm manner, his reliability and generosity, and his great empathy. Together with his immense and broad expertise, this made him a role model. Under his leadership, there was a very motivating and pleasant climate at the IPZ, and a friendly and collegial tone was maintained. His office door was always open to all employees, and he was available to them with professional as well as personal advice. He is one of those people who combine high academic skills with high social competence.

One of Peter Deplazes' major concerns was the promotion of young scientists. For example, he supervised countless doctorates, both nationally and internationally, led the training of several EVPC diploma students and actively promoted many scientific careers. Although he achieved a great deal in the promotion of young scientists, at times he felt a sense of discomfort. This is the only way to explain that for a while the saying 'You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink' hung on the wall in his office.

His office, but also the seminar room of the IPZ, bear witness to his great interest in art and his understanding of art, as numerous sculptures, art cards and paintings (such as modern landscapes; animal studies) by contemporary artists are on display. The latter include his son Andriu Deplazes, whose works are presented in renowned art galleries and art museums.

A completely new aspect - football - entered Peter Deplazes' life when his daughter Barla Deplazes stormed onto the pitch at the highest level for the glorious Football Club Zurich (FCZ) and the national team. Within a short time, he acquired the relevant expertise to be able, for example, to criticise the national team coach soundly and convincingly for tactical mistakes.

Peter Deplazes likes to spend his meagre free time in his homeland, the Surselva, and in Burgundy, where he and his wife Véronique Pfeiffer bought a farm a long time ago, which they have renovated gently and stylishly over the years. There he can also live out his handicraft and gardening talents.

We are pleased to present in the January 2022 issue of the Swiss Archives of Veterinary Medicine scientific papers that were prepared at parasitological institutes in Switzerland and abroad, which are dedicated to Peter Deplazes and also include a summary in Rhaeto-Romanic in his honour.

With his retirement, parasitology will not completely lose him. It is planned that he will continue to contribute his knowledge to echinococcosis research in the group of Prof. Beat Müllhaupt at the USZ.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our great thanks to Peter for his enormous commitment to the Institute and his tireless support of the staff. For the rest of his life, we wish him only the best, good health, much joy, and fulfilment in his future endeavours, but also time to pause and enjoy time with his family and friends. We hope that the contact with him will continue for a long time.

Zürich, January 2022

Alexander Mathis, Manuela Schnyder, Felix Grimm,  
Ramon Eichenberger, Lucienne Tritten, Adrian Hehl