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Double faces with an important function for ocean health

Parasites in marine food webs are Professor Dr David Thieltges' research focus who today receives the 29th Petersen Excellence Professorship

06.11.2023/Kiel. With his work in the field of marine parasite ecology, Professor Dr David Thieltges from the Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research and the University of Groningen provides important insights into the functioning of marine ecosystems and ocean health. In honour of his contributions, the Prof. Dr. Werner Petersen Foundation today awards him the 29th Petersen Excellence Professorship at GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel. The Excellence Professorship also strengthens the collaboration with Kiel marine researchers in the Ocean Health research initiative.

Parasites do not have a good reputation: They can trigger serious diseases in humans and animals or cause economic damage. What is less well known is that, on the other hand, they provide important services for ocean health as the basis for the functioning of marine ecosystems. The double-faced role of organisms that are often perceived as unwanted is altered by global changes, for example due to increasing warming or the introduction of alien species into established communities. These changes form a focal point in ecological parasitology.

Professor Dr. David Thieltges, Senior Scientist at the Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research (Koninklijk Nederlands Instituut voor Zeeonderzoek, NIOZ) and Honorary Professor at the University of Groningen, is advancing scientific knowledge in this field. In his research group, he uses laboratory and field experiments to investigate the effects of parasites on marine host individuals, populations and communities. He also tracks patterns and processes underlying the infection of marine hosts. Using literature-based data sets as well as biogeographical and macroecological approaches, he analyses driving forces behind the development of parasitism in the sea over the course of evolution.

For his outstanding research, he receives the 29th Petersen Excellence Professorship of the Prof. Dr. Werner Petersen Foundation at a public event at GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel today. In his keynote lecture "The ecological significance of parasites in marine ecosystems", Professor Dr. Thieltges reports on the complex lifestyles of these organisms.

"David Thieltges noticed the importance of parasite biodiversity for the functioning of food webs earlier than many other researchers. We are therefore looking forward to a joint course section on this topic in our Biological Oceanography degree programme in the summer semester of 2024," says laudator Professor Dr Thorsten Reusch, Head of the GEOMAR Research Department Marine Ecology. "At the same time, this award helps to strengthen the international network of the Kiel research initiative Ocean Health."

"We congratulate Professor Dr. Thieltges on the well-deserved award and thank the Prof. Dr Werner Petersen Foundation for the opportunity to work closely with a leading representative of a highly specialised, socially relevant field," says GEOMAR Director Professor Dr Katja Matthes. "Our joint research and the exchange across scientific career levels raises awareness of the importance of parasites in the ocean ecosystem and thus also strengthens our Kiel research initiative on ocean health."

Congratulations were also offered by the Chairman of the Foundation, Dr. h.c. Klaus-Jürgen Wichmann, and the deputy chairman and managing director, Dr. Christian Zöllner.

The Prof. Dr Werner Petersen Foundation from Schleswig-Holstein promotes outstanding achievements in science, research, technology and culture. Among other activities, excellence professorships are awarded to international scientists. The foundation focusses on a strong commitment to promoting young talent. The award, which is endowed with 20,000 euros, includes a research stay at GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel.

In the “Meet the Prof” series of the Foster Young Ocean Researcher Development (FYORD) programme of the Kiel Marine Science (KMS) research focus at Kiel University and GEOMAR, Professor Dr. Thieltges presents his research to young scientists in the afternoon before the award ceremony.

Links:

<https://www.geomar.de/zentrum/preise-und-auszeichnungen/exzellenzprofessuren/29-david-thieltges> GEOMAR: Die ökologische Bedeutung von Parasiten in Meeresökosystemen (German only)
<https://www.uni-kiel.de/en/research/priority-research-areas/kiel-marine-science/research/ocean-health> Research initiative Ocean Health on the Kiel University Website
<https://www.geomar.de/en/fb3-ms/ocean-health> GEOMAR: The Kiel research initiative Ocean Health
<https://www.geomar.de/zentrum/preise-und-auszeichnungen/exzellenzprofessuren> Exzellenz-Initiative der Prof. Dr. Werner Petersen-Stiftung (German only)
<https://petersen-stiftung.de> Prof. Dr. Werner-Petersen-Stiftung (German only)

Images:

Images are available for download at <http://www.geomar.de/n9180-e>

Contact:

Maike Nicolai (GEOMAR, Communication & Media), media@geomar.de