

**Statement on case of scientific misconduct raised
against Anders Pape Møller by Jørgen Rabøl**

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Since May 2001 I have been formally investigated for scientific misconduct by a Danish committee working under Forskningsstyrelsen (612-00-0005), Danish Ministry of Research and Education. I have strongly disputed all allegations. However, my main worry has been the lack of a proper administrative practice and the biases of the committee, as detailed below. The complaint was submitted by Mr. Jørgen Rabøl. The committee ruled in December 2003 that the disputed paper was based partly on fabricated data. Since I was a co-author and the only Dane involved (the committee can only pursue cases that relate to Danish scientists), I was considered to be responsible for someone having fabricated the data. This conclusion is problematic because (1) the calculations made by the committee cannot be verified by an independent specialist in the field; (2) the conclusions by the committee were based on a data file submitted by Mr. Rabøl that was never verified by independent third parties as being the original file; and (3) a sub-committee that evaluated the data files consisted of one person who had a clear conflict of interest. I can summarise the case and my complaints in the following way.

Brief summary of the case

I was professor in population biology at University of Copenhagen, Denmark, 1st October 1994 - 15th March 1996. I resigned because of nepotistic appointments and a other activities at the department. For example, two associate professorships were filled with local candidates without the positions ever having been advertised internationally. Furthermore, I was chairman of two international job search committees, and the university in both cases over-ruled the decisions of the committee and appointed a local, less qualified candidate. Two associate professors at the department were only present on days when lecturing, and they showed no or little indication of any research activity conducted during their absence. As an example, Mr. J. Rabøl (an associate professor) had reported at the department that he was doing field work on the island Christiansø in spring 1995. I went to this island to help a former PhD student (N. Cadée). During my stay of 5 work-days Mr. Rabøl did nothing but talk to the locals, or fish and play with his children. Obviously, my student and I found it unacceptable that a senior staff member could do so at the tune of a monthly salary of \$4,500. Other such examples exist. One

year after having resigned I filed an official complaint about this and a large number of other cases of malpractice to the chancellor of the university, who ordered an evaluation by an international committee. This committee produced a highly critical and damning report about the department, as had a previous report by another committee three years earlier. Mr. Rabøl and a second associate professor were subsequently granted retirement by the university following a decision by the chancellor. Subsequently, Mr. Rabøl has spent a considerable amount of time attempting degrading me in conversations with a wide range of persons, in print and in formal complaints submitted to a committee under the Danish Ministry of Research and Education. I find it likely that a motive behind the present case is nothing but revenge.

The case concerns a paper on asymmetry in oak leaves published in *Oikos* 82:246-252, 1998. Mr. Rabøl alleged that this paper was based on fabricated data. The data were obtained as measurements of leaves of oak trees (all leaves are still available) by a technician, Ms. J. Andersen. When I was Professor at Department of Population Biology at Copenhagen University 1994-1996, Ms.

Andersen regularly complained about not having any work to do in although the department had more than 15 scientific staff. As head of the ecology group I had to find work for her, and I asked her to measure the leaves. I re-measured a small sample when Ms. Andersen started her work, and I found consistency between my measurements and hers. Hence, I never re-measured other leaves after this early stage, believing that her work was appropriate. After publication of the paper I was contacted by Prof. N. Malmer, editor-in-chief of Oikos, and he stated that something was wrong with the study based on a manuscript by Mr. Rabøl and Ms. J. Andersen. I re-measured the leaves and asked a student to blindly re-measure a large sample. The relationship between my measurements and those of the student was strongly positive, while that was not the case for those of Ms. Andersen with those of either my student or myself. I then contacted my colleague and co-author Prof. F. de Lope, presenting this information. My co-author and I then decided that the only appropriate thing to do would be to retract the paper, which was done.

Complaint submitted to the Danish ombudsman

I have filed a complaint to the Danish minister and the Danish ombudsman concerning the way in which this case has been handled and the final decision. Specifically, I have filed three main points of complaint:

1. Findings by sub-committee are not correct. The sub-committee appointed by the committee investigating the case concluded that the findings in the paper were inconsistent with the data files submitted. I have given my data files to a colleague who is an expert on the subject considered. He has been able to arrive at the findings published in the original paper based on his own, independent calculations. He did not receive any help or advice from me. Hence, I suggest that the conclusions by the sub-committee are incorrect either because of their calculations or the cases included in their calculations.

Two Spanish colleagues and I have in an independent experiment arrived at similar findings as those published in the original paper. These findings were obtained without my taking part in the actual data collection. Hence, I can state that the main findings are repeatable.

The two papers reporting these findings are the following:

Herbivore effects on developmental instability and fecundity of *Quercus ilex*. - *Oecologia* (in press) (authors M. Diaz, F. Pulido and A. P. Møller).

Fruit abortion, developmental selection and developmental stability in *Quercus ilex*. - *Oecologia* 135:378-385, 2003 (authors M. Diaz, A. P. Møller and F. J. Pulido).

2. Is the data file the original one? I have suggested that the committee investigates whether the file submitted by Mr. Rabøl, who is accusing me of misconduct, indeed is the original one, since I believe that somebody might have tampered with the file. To the best of my knowledge there was nobody else present than Ms. Andersen and Mr. Rabøl, when Mr. Rabøl opened the file at the department. Hence, there was nobody impartial to witness that it was the original file, and that it remained intact. Hence nobody knows whether the data file used for this case is the original file. I maintain that the committee may have accused somebody of misconduct

without having verified that the file upon which this claim is being made is the original data file.

I have published over 450 scientific papers with more than 140 different scientists, and never once have I had any complaints about my conduct in these collaborations. Hence, the present complaint is extraordinary. I have shown clearly in the correspondence with the committee that Ms. Andersen, who made all the measurements, produced results that could not be replicated by independent measurers. This information has been transferred to the committee. I have offered the committee access to the original material, which is still available. However, the committee has decided not to consider this offer, thereby refusing to assess whether the current case may result from the inappropriate behaviour of a technician. I also note that Mr. Rabøl, who knew perfectly well why Ms. Andersen had 'nothing to do' at a department with more than 15 scientists, did not inform me about her substance abuse problems, and that data provided by her might have problems of reliability.

3. Conflicts of interest in a sub-committee. On 4th February 2002 I formally complained about the composition of a sub-committee of three persons

that was established to investigate the case. I find it extraordinary that implicated parties in a particular case are not asked about the composition of a committee. In this particular case one member of the committee (Prof. F. B. Christiansen) clearly had a conflict of interest since I have known him for 20 years. In addition, I and several colleagues are of the opinion that Dr. Christiansen is strongly opposed for purely political reasons to the research that I am conducting on humans. Only in totalitarian and corrupt countries, but apparently in Denmark as well, is it legal to establish committees with clear conflicts of interest. I find the use of such a committee member inexcusable.

Additional comments

Mr. Rabøl has a history of repeatedly accusing scientists, who were not present, of having manipulated or made up their data sets. This happened repeatedly during departmental seminars while discussing published papers. When I was professor at Department of Population Biology, Copenhagen University, I arranged weekly literature seminars that were public and usually attracted

master's and PhD students, postdocs and some staff. During these seminars we discussed an article from the recent scientific literature and in that way trained students to argue, but also to constructively improve their ability to evaluate research findings. During these events Mr. J. Rabøl repeatedly accused the authors of papers of scientific misconduct or direct fabrication of data. Requested by me directly, on what he based such blunt claims, he never answered more directly than simply stating that "the results are too nice" or "this is clearly not true". I stated that this was not a sufficient basis for such terrible accusations, and that his behaviour was not a way of discussing scientific problems. I also made it clear for Mr. J. Rabøl in private after one seminar that such behaviour was unacceptable, in particular in an educational context. However, Mr. Rabøl continued his baseless accusations. Several students and postdocs contacted me and asked what was the objective of such accusations, and whether Mr. Rabøl was mentally sane. I strongly supported their points of view that his behaviour was completely unacceptable. All these events have been witnessed by persons who are willing to step forward and give their description of the situation. Based on my own notes I can state that

Prof. D. Gwynne, Canada, Prof. L. Simmons, Australia, Prof. W. Wiltschko, Germany, and several others were among the accused.

Unfortunaltely, I was not given any information about why this technician had so little work to do. It seems to me that most colleagues in normal circumstances would have provided such information as a normal gesture of courtesy.

Conclusions

The conclusions by the committee concerning the consistency between the data presented in the original paper and in my data files are incorrect, as determined by an independent external expert.

The conclusions by the committee are based on a data file submitted by Mr. J. Rabøl, a file that has not been verified as being the original one. This leaves open the possibility that somebody with a motive of revenge may have altered the data file, making my data files appear to be fabricated.

The sub-committee that evaluated the data files had one member who had a clear conflict of interest.

I am prepared to challenge all allegations through the Danish bureaucratic system and, if necessary, through the courts.

In case of questions or comments, please submit these to the address listed above.

Please feel free to circulate this document.

Anders Pape Møller