

Personalities

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Without doubt, John Temple Lang has been one of the most energetic organising forces in Irish ornithology, although his appearance belies that energy. When met, relaxed in an ancient leather armchair in Dublin's University Club on one of his brief visits to Ireland, dressed in his habitual tweed suit, he looks far removed from the modern image of an ornithologist, typically encased in uniform of beard, boots and binoculars. A few moments of conversation indicate immediately how misleading first impressions can be. He is well informed on the state of Irish ornithology; he has firm views on what is needed for the future; and he is bent on convincing the Irish Wildbird Conservancy that action is required urgently to implement these views. Although people may disagree with his opinions, he is always ready to listen and argue the point. But his legal training and his capacity for research generally leave him better equipped to convert his listeners.

John is a solicitor by profession. He was born in 1936 and graduated from Trinity College, Dublin, with a brilliant university record. He has had a varied professional career involving periods in practice, in civil service positions in Ghana and in Ireland, in legal research in Chicago and, since 1974, in the Legal Service of the Commission of the European Communities. He is a true European. At an early stage of his professional career, he wrote a textbook on law and the Common Market. When abroad, he has always taken every opportunity to extend his experience of conservation and ornithological research by visiting reserves and making contact with leading ornithologists.

His lasting monument in Ireland is the Irish Wildbird Conservancy. He was one of the prime moving forces behind the amalgamation of the Irish Society for the Protection of Birds, the Irish Ornithologists' Club and the Irish Wildfowl Conservancy to form the new organisation in 1968. This was an extremely sensible move, uniting the conservation and ornithological bodies under a single council and with a forceful executive committee of which John was secretary until 1972 and then chairman until his departure for Brussels in 1974. At the same time as he was playing a central role in the organisation politics which inevitably precedes the unification of several independent bodies, he was researching wildlife conservation legislation. The results were incorporated in detailed recommendations which were eventually agreed by all the Irish sporting and conservation bodies and formed the basis of the Irish Wildlife Act, 1976.

His interests have ranged well beyond Ireland. As early as 1967, he started, with Peter Conder, the successful series of All-Ireland Conferences run jointly by the IWC and the RSPB (and remembers with particular



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pleasure his close teamwork with that unrepentant Scot, Frank Hamilton). As council member of the BTO as well as the IWC, he played a major part in securing the co-operation of both bodies in the triumphant Atlas project, and he moved into international conservation when he became secretary of the Irish section of the ICBP in 1965.

Although his greatest interest appears to be conservation, John enjoys fieldwork. He visited Saltee Bird Observatory regularly in the 1950s, but he says himself that he is not interested in just watching birds or looking for rarities. He prefers to study birds scientifically for a specific project. In recent years in Ireland, his fieldwork has been concentrated on monitoring the Peregrine population (1967-73), the Atlas (1968-72) and most recently the IWC's wildfowl and wader count project. One of us has been in the field with him on a number of occasions and can vouch for his enthusiasm and energy in travelling long distances to ensure thorough coverage.

In Belgium, he has continued such field studies, including participating fully in their Atlas project. But he has also played a key part in the development of European conservation. As a member of the expert working group which drafted the basic principles of the proposed EEC directive on bird conservation, he displayed both his legal expertise and his passionate concern for wider conservation issues. The directive has now been adopted and will lead not only to a tightening of the standards of bird protection of the nine countries involved, but also to a major increase in the emphasis placed on habitat conservation, with all that that implies for every kind of wildlife.

It is hard to believe that John's keen interest in the Irish scene will ever evaporate: over the last four years, as a council member and trustee of the IWC, he has bombarded his colleagues with letters and memoranda from Brussels, at times with a frequency disturbing to those unable to match his commitment. Yet many will hope that his knowledge of international

conservation problems and his quiet but relentless advocacy will be used to the full in the testing years ahead.

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