

Personalities

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If Stephanie visited the United States (from where we write), she would undoubtedly be dubbed a 'ball of fire'. This phrase aptly describes this remarkable and personable young woman. Nurtured in Lincolnshire, Stephanie moved a short distance south to Cambridge to graduate in zoology and then gain her PhD with a three-year study under Professor Robert Hinde of the behaviour of free-range ponies in the New Forest.

In this period, she met Lindsay Tyler, her veterinarian husband-to-be; following their marriage, they settled in Wiltshire and, after the normal incubation periods, she brought forth a splendid brood of two pulli: Robert and Sally. It is appropriate to introduce all members of the family, for Stephanie is essentially a family-oriented person, and it is difficult for us to consider her in isolation; indeed we can think of no occasion on which she was engaged in outdoor activities without the presence of at least one member of her family.

During her four years' residence in Wiltshire, her time was not devoted only to family care, but also to a study of the local Grey Wagtails; and among other achievements, she gained the distinction of becoming Britain's leading female bird-ringer. Then, from this parochial level, the family's horizons broadened when they accompanied Lindsay on a six-month assignment to the United Arab Emirates. There, she became acquainted for the first time with birds of an arid region, and experienced the wonders of seeing the vast hordes of Palearctic migrants bound for Africa.

In 1973, the fireball arrived in Ethiopia, and our days of tranquil leisure were over. We were faced with demands for bird-rings; were pressed into providing monthly contributions for the newsletter of the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society and articles and illustrations for the conservation journal *Agazen*, which was distributed to over 2,000 schools throughout the country; and were persuaded to lead natural history tours. Such are Stephanie's dynamism, enthusiasm and powers of persuasion that we—and many others—did it all willingly.

Greatly rewarding for Stephanie, both in the field and at her desk, the period in Ethiopia also brought out the toughness of her character, although far be it for us to suggest that she lacks femininity: she is just a tough female with tough children. We soon discovered this on joint field trips to Borana and Koka Lake; even more rugged ventures were undertaken on family trips to (aptly named) Lake Stephanie and the Omo River, and to the Gilo River close to the Sudan in western Ethiopia. Throughout this period, she was also engaged in a BOU-supported investigation into the ecological factors determining the distribution of local and migrant wagtails. During this time, a number of trying experi-



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ences were to put her further to the test: plunging into a burning tent to rescue her sleeping children; bashing on the head with a stone an attacking Ethiopian, who had thrown her to the ground, and then returning to base splattered with his blood; being thrown from her horse which had bolted into a forest, and then somehow managing to remount and ride home with a broken leg.

All this, however, was but a foretaste—albeit valuable training—for the hardships to come. In May 1976, the whole family was captured by rebel forces in northern Ethiopia and held captive for over eight months under particularly exacting circumstances. The full story has been told many times, and will be familiar to most readers of this profile. Undoubtedly, the factors which carried them through this harrowing experience, when every day was filled with doubts about their ultimate fate, were their close-knit family unity and their shared interest in the

phenomena of nature around them, with which they were obliged to live in close intimacy. That Stephanie made good use of her time during this period will be evidenced by a forthcoming paper in the *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club* on the birds she observed during her captivity. Her only regret was that her binoculars were confiscated by the rebels, so that ornithologically she was unable to make the best use of her time.

We said at the start that Stephanie is a remarkable woman. We meant it!

J. S. ASH and J. W. ASH