

Obituaries

Charles A. Wilson (1912-1980)

With the death of Charles Wilson on 2nd January 1980, conservation in Britain lost one of its major protagonists. He fought for the welfare of the birds he loved as powerfully and effectively in the field as he did around the committee table. Yet his interest in birds developed comparatively late. A fervent Yorkshireman, he was educated at Giggleswick and lived for most of his life in Leeds. His first interest was rugby; he captained the team at Giggleswick and later played for Headingley. He was apprenticed to the family firm as an engineer, then, as a Territorial, he joined the Royal

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128. Charles A. Wilson (1912-1980) (*Ackroyd Photography & RSPB*)

Artillery in 1939 and, after service in Britain, France and North America, reached the rank of Major. He returned after the war to engineering, rising steadily in his profession to become works manager, director, and finally managing director of a large engineering group.

Despite these heavy business commitments, his interest in birds, first aroused by his father, also flowered after the war. He joined the Leeds Bird Club in the late 1950s and became its president, and then the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union, where he soon became active on its Protection of Birds Act Committee and a practical scourge of lawbreakers (though he later denied that 'marsh cowboys' were ever pushed into the water, except perhaps accidentally). His passion for conservation became known nationally and he was invited to join the Council of the RSPB. He became its chairman from 1971 to 1976, a period of major expansion when its reserves multiplied and the membership trebled to over 180,000. A big man in every way, who could be tough when the need arose, he was a cheerful and highly effective chairman, combining business and managerial skills with a shrewd knowledge of human nature and a burning enthusiasm for bird conservation.

In later years, his professional commitments took him to many parts of the world, enabling him to increase his wide knowledge of birds and to learn at first hand of the many threats they are facing. When he retired to Dent (which, to his fury, was transferred by soulless administrators from Yorkshire to Cumbria), he had more time to study birds (and orchids) in the field, but still had enough energy to partake in parish affairs and use his engineering skills to refurbish old clocks. He became president of the Yorkshire Naturalists' Trust and returned to the RSPB Council in 1979. His warm and kindly nature, his energy and his dedication will be sadly missed. Our sympathies are extended to his wife, a successful architect, and to their three daughters.

STANLEY CRAMP

Miss Phyllis Ida Barclay-Smith, CBE, MBOU (1903-1980)

An era passed in international bird protection with the death on 2nd January of Phyllis Barclay-Smith. As Assistant Secretary first of the RSPB and then of the International Council for Bird Preservation, and, from 1946, as Secretary of the ICBP, her unbroken service covered 56 years. By virtue of her skill and personality, she was always the Queen Bee in her global hive; everything revolved around her. Always respected, widely loved, and sometimes dreaded, she rejoiced in her affectionate nickname 'The Dragon', and took most seriously her mission to keep order, make progress and ensure the efficient conduct of business. Ever a loyal and warm friend, she established relations of trust with outstanding active personalities in her field, such as Jean Delacour, Leon Lippens, Edward Hindle, Cyril Hurcomb, Kai Curry-Lindahl and James Callaghan MP, whom she partnered to enduring effect in the Advisory Committee on Oil Pollution of the Sea. Another of these, Dillon Ripley, has written that he 'always looked to her for guidance



129. Phyllis Barclay-Smith (1903-1980)

on the many issues that faced us' during his 22 years with her as President of the ICBP.

Richly endowed with a sense of drama, but equally of humour, of character reading and of means of inducing action even among the inactive, she enjoyed living in an atmosphere of imminent disaster, which was, however, always to be averted in the nick of time by the prompt and heroic interventions of her colleagues and herself. Life with Phyllis could be challenging and crisis-ridden, but it was always also amusing, stimulating and very much worth while. Quintessentially English, she was instantly at home anywhere in the world. She fascinated many foreigners. On one occasion, at a conference which the Hungarian delegate was prevented at the last minute from attending, she agreed without demur to stand in for him, and performed with aplomb the extra role of representing Hungary. She was a Corresponding Member of the Hungarian Institute of Ornithology, and of at least four ornithological unions abroad. She held, as well as the CBE, the Netherlands Order of the Golden Ark. She was awarded the Gold Medal of the World Wildlife Fund in its 10th Birthday Honours in 1971, and became a Member of Honour of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature on its 30th Anniversary in 1978. She also held the Delacour Gold Medal of the ICBP, the Geoffroy St Hilaire Gold Medal from France, and others from Sweden, among numerous other distinctions.

At the critical time at the end of the Second World War, she became secretary and treasurer of the BOU, where her tasks for the ensuing peace included using her international friendships to great effect in guiding the rebuilding of the shattered unity of European ornithology. As a Vice-President of the Union, she also gracefully assisted in welcoming the guests for its centenary celebrations in March 1959.

Notable among her other contributions was her formative role in the International Wildfowl Research Bureau, as its Joint Honorary Secretary during its first 21 years, from 1948, and as an invaluable member of the influential Home Office Advisory Committee on Protection of Birds. She served also on the Executive Board of the IUCN, to which she brought unique experience from the pioneer body in international protection, the ICBP. From 1939 to 1973, she was Editor of *The Avicultural Magazine*—not 'Agricultural' as *The Times* misprinted it. Her knowledge of languages enabled her to publish translations of French and German bird books, and she also published three of her own. It was, however, as one of the foremost contributors to the creation and rapid advance of modern bird conservation, and of its close links with scientific ornithology, rather than directly in the ornithological field, that her life's work takes its place in history.

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