G. K. Yeates MA FRPS (1910-1995)
The telephone rang. 'Have you got a dinner jacket?' It was our local RSPB rep. and Hon. Secretary of the Harrogate & District Naturalists' Society, who was organising our first joint film show in the town way back in 1968. Why the question? The famous G. K. Yeates was to introduce the films, and, if I also was to appear on stage, I had better be properly dressed. This was the first of my many such annual meetings with this almost legendary photographer, writer and lecturer. I felt that I knew him well, having read, and reread, his *Bird Haunts in Northern Britain* (1948), companion to his earlier *Bird Haunts in Southern Britain* (1947). These and three other titles, concentrating on visits he had made to Spain, France and Iceland, inspired a whole generation of would-be naturalists to do more than simply list what they saw. George, through his words and wonderful photographs, invited us to explore wilderness with him. The art of just sitting and waiting for things to happen, lost to many today, was central to the wildlife photographer's art in those days long gone. Having given up bird-photography in the mid 1960s, George then devoted most of his spare time to his other great love, fishing, and to growing alpines, and increasingly he withdrew from front-line ornithology.

Dr Kevin Carlson, a great friend over many years, recalls that George used a Gandolfi mahogany-and-brass camera with a Cook Aviar lens and wooden Ashworth tripod. He made all his own hides and in the early days carried the whole lot on a bicycle. Amazing!

George's attitude to birds and to bird-photography was that of a hunter. He relished the thrill of the chase. He had, indeed, at one time been a wildfowler, and his greatest thrill was to obtain his trophy, which was, of course, a top-class photograph. On trips, his companions regarded him as wonderful company in the field, with a sense of humour described as 'raucous'. From my personal experiences at The Royal Hall, Harrogate, George came over as totally professional, with a deep and genuine concern for the protection of wildlife and wild places.

George was a prominent figure in The Royal Photographic Society, having been elected as a Member in 1937 and as a Fellow in 1938 and awarded its Exhibition Medal in 1947. He served as Hon. Secretary of the select Zoological Photographic Club for six years, from 1948 to 1953, and was then its President during 1954-55. Throughout this period, he had been adviser on photographic matters to the Editorial Board of *British Birds*, and this was recognised in 1952 when he was formally given the title of Photographic Editor, a new position, which he held for eight years, until December 1959, when his interest in photography had begun to wane, and he handed over to the equally well-known Eric Hosking. A tribute to his contributions to bird-photography and to *British Birds* was published, together with a selection of his photographs, in 1965 (*Brit. Birds* 58: 372-374, plates 52-59).

He had passed on his knowledge, experience and enthusiasm in his book *Bird
Photography (1946), but why did George give up bird-photography in the 1960s? Did he feel that the world of photography had moved on? Did he feel that he had really achieved all that he had set out to do? We shall never know the answers to these questions, but I know that George—if he is, in some mysterious way, reading this—can take enormous satisfaction from the fact that he helped to open the eyes of a generation of young naturalists before the days of high-fashion wildlife organisations, videos and television. He did something which is still the cornerstone of our conservation movements: he made people care.

Born in Leeds in 1910, G. K. Yeates outlived most of his contemporaries, and the effects of his enthusiasm live on.

TREVOR GUNTION

Long ago, when I was a raw young Cambridge medical student aged 19 at my first ornithological conference at Oxford, I found myself dining next to a tall, dark, courteous, knowledgeable, wise, unpretentious and entertaining Scot a couple of years older than myself. We had a lively discussion, but I never noticed his name, and realised it only recently when I found my old programme. When we dined together again a few days before his death, he was heavier, greyer, and now accompanied by his wife, Mom, but otherwise unchanged. I asked if he remembered our first meeting, but in his time he had met many gauche young students, and had forgotten this one. Yet, like most of his innumerable other friends, I shall always remember both my first and my last meetings with George Dunnet as two of the pleasantest occasions of my life.

George was born in Caithness and grew up at Stuartfield in Buchan, where he attended Peterhead Academy. His first teacher (now in her eighties) reports that ‘He was a quiet boy’. He first seems to have made his mark as a zoologist when he encountered Regius Professor Vero Wynne-Edwards and Robert Carrick at Aberdeen University. Robert took him to the lovely green islet of Eynhallow in Orkney to investigate Vero’s hypothesis that Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis* do not breed every year, and the Eynhallow Fulmars remained one of George’s main interests for the rest of his life. He demonstrated the unprecedented length of this study by showing two photographs of himself and the same Fulmar taken some 30 years apart, in which only he had visibly aged. He used to take his students and friends on trips there several times a year, and knew all the Fulmars personally, though I was recently surprised to discover that, owing to the timing of the visits, he never ascertained whether, like him, they occasionally disappeared for sabbatical years.

After completing his thesis on Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* and visiting the Bureau of Animal Population at Oxford, George married Mom Thomson, who also came from Buchan via Aberdeen University, and who formed the other half of a formidable partnership. They joined Robert Carrick with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) in Australia, where Mom bore the first two of their three children, and George studied fleas, the Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, the Brush-tailed Possum *Trichosurus vulpecula*, the Quokka *Setonyx brachyurus* (a rat-kangaroo), and the birds of remote Macquarie Island. Then, in 1958, he was recalled to Aberdeen to
open the University’s new Cultery Field Station on the River Ythan, which was
soon attended by both students and senior research workers from all around the
World, whom George would subsequently visit in their home countries.

He also made a distinguished contribution to the seminars and parties held by
a local Vertebrate Ecologists’ Group (or Glenlivet Club) organised by David
Jenkins. In consequence, when it was decided at the annual Bird Observatories’
Conference in 1965 to set up a Seabird Group, we invited George to become its
first Chairman. He went to great trouble over launching it, putting up with
innumerable argumentative committee meetings during busy trips to England,
where he restored law and order whenever necessary, until he resigned on making
a sabbatical circumnavigation three years later. In consequence, he received little
of the credit due, when it proved a great success and was used as the model for
the establishment of many similar bodies in four other continents.

When, in 1970, the Seabird Group was awarded a large grant, we therefore
asked if we could spend it in Aberdeen, where George was now promoting liaison
between local scientists and the developing North Sea oil industry. The first
emergency arose when a local BBC television journalist, Jack Regan, discovered
at the last moment that it was proposed to bring the main gas pipelines ashore
across the quiet waters of the Loch of Strathbeg to an £8 billion terminal in the
green pastures of the Crimond of the psalm tune. An Environmental Liaison
Group was hastily set up with George as Chairman, and the terminal was moved
a vital 5 km south (which was in its own interests, as there was insufficient space
for expansion at the first site).

After this, George, who by now had succeeded Vero Wynne-Edwards as
Regius Professor, and was advising on the design of the now-undetectable first
mainland oil-pipeline landfall, was also asked to chair a continuing Shetland Oil
Terminal Environmental Advisory Group (SOTEAG), which has helped to avoid
trouble in another key area, and carried out much useful research. This was such
a success that he was then asked to chair many other official bodies devoted to
such things as research on seabirds, on Badgers *Meles meles* and tuberculosis, and
on the management of Red Deer *Cervus elaphus* and Salmon *Salmo salar*, and to
advise on similar problems throughout the World.

In the past, he would go for country walks with a group of friends on Sunday
afternoons, but more recently this was replaced by croquet (which is not the
innocent game that it appears). Such occasions were accompanied by a stream of
entertaining discussion and would lead to a bibulous ‘tea’-party. He could rise to
any occasion, as for example when he was visiting a French radio station and a
microphone was thrust into his hand without warning. He had always carried a
vast workload, and ruthlessly suppressed his own feelings in contentious
situations, and this continued after his retirement, though he did recently resign
from Scottish Natural Heritage when it proved unwilling to accept scientific
advice, which must have added greatly to the strain upon him. Eventually, he had
a stroke while in Copenhagen to chair a panel of experts considering the possible
environmental impact of a bridge between Denmark and Sweden.

He was an honest, charming and talented man who worked himself to death
in the cause of conservation.

*W. R. P. Bourne*