
EDITORIAL

Monica Green, retiring BHS Membership Secretary: a tribute

The 2006 AGM marked the end of an era in the history of the BHS, as we paid tribute to Mrs. Monica Green, BHS Secretary for an incredible 54 years. Monica took up the position in 1952, at the age of 27. Little could she have known that this was a task that would take over her life for so many years to come!

Monica has seen the highs and lows of BHS history; Presidents and Chairmen have come and gone while she remained strong, steadfast and dedicated to her role. For some of those long years Monica also simultaneously held the office of Treasurer.

If further testament was needed, some may find it surprising that reptiles and amphibians in general are not Monica's main interest. "I love my tortoises but I'm not so interested in lizards and snakes" she once told me. 'I'm really more interested in gardening'. This fact alone serves as an indication of the commitment that Monica has so selflessly given so much of her free time to the Society. For 54 years Monica has been steadfast in her role. There can be no doubt that the British Herpetological Society owes her a debt of gratitude.

In recognition of her achievements and commitment to the Society, Monica was presented with a suitably inscribed memorial bird-bath, made from green Lakeland slate and specially commissioned by the BHS from a stonemason in the Lake District. This was Monica's choice and will stand proudly in her church garden (after it has spent sometime being admired by passers-by in her own front garden!). An encyclopaedia of Roses was also presented.

Her dedication is an inspiration to me in attempting to follow in her footsteps. I know how personally responsible she felt and I know how difficult the decision was for her to relinquish this responsibility. But at the age of 81, Monica is surely entitled to a long-overdue break from BHS duties, although as an Honorary Life Member I have no doubt she will keep a watchful eye on our activities!

Trevor Rose

It is impossible to exaggerate Monica's contribution to the BHS. For decades she was the mainstay of the Society, and its current healthy state is in large part due to her unwavering efforts and devotion over such a long period. I well remember the crisis, some 25 years ago now, when she temporarily left her post as Secretary and Treasurer following the death of her husband. The BHS came close to collapse at that time, but fortunately for us she sailed back to the rescue. I am particularly grateful for her support during my stint as Chairman in the early 1990s. Indeed, I find it hard to imagine the Society without her. She has all my good wishes for a long and healthy life, and I look forward to seeing her at future meetings.

Trevor Beebee

The short time that I was President of the Society coincided with major problems over the employment of our then Education Officer. This was when I had most to do with Monica: we were in telephone contact almost daily for a period of several months. She was a tower of strength and shrewd, sound advice. I don't want to open old wounds, but it was common knowledge that the police were involved with these problems. Monica bore the brunt of their visits. I am sure that at first they didn't quite know what to make of the eccentric (to them) and rather severe (to them) lady whose love was the odd one (to them) of reptiles and amphibians. But they thawed - tribute to a multitalented lady whom I admire very much. My good wishes, Monica!

Roger Avery

I knew Monica by name for many years before joining the Society and meeting her - which I did after returning to England from the Sudan in 1971. (I had always been fascinated by amphibians and reptiles, but it was not until my appointment to the University of Khartoum in 1960 that sufficient material became available to undertake my type of research on them). By that time, Harold Fox had taken over from my friend Angus Bellairs as Editor, British Journal of Herpetology, while Deryk Frazer - another friend from the '50's, was still President. Thirty-five years seems a very long while ago, yet Monica had already been BHS Secretary for nearly 20 years! There can be few people to have served



veterinary surgeon and encouraged me in this, emphasising always how much needed to be learnt about diseases of reptiles and amphibians and suggesting that I should make myself known to Dr Edward Elkan (see below). Monica was always a wonderful source of information about the Society, its members and its history. She was an important link with Major Maxwell Knight (radio-naturalist and the inspiration for ‘M’ in the James Bond books), whom she remembered as one of the founders of the BHS. Maxwell Knight became my mentor and our son is named after him. Later, when I had graduated, had my first stint in Africa and returned

any scientific society for even half as long as Monica has, and I feel honoured to add my personal appreciation to those of her many other friends.
John Cloudsley-Thompson

for a while to Britain, Monica was an integral part of various ventures, mainly relating to herpetological medicine, that I organised - in particular, the commemorative meetings and lectures in honour of Dr Elkan.

Monica is a long standing important member of the conservation committee and has always supported the aims of the committee whole heartedly in her own way though some members may not realise to what extent as she has never blown her own trumpet. She has always been very active locally with the physical side of conservation although again some members may not have been aware of this as it did not involve the rare species but very important in N.London for the so called more common species. There is no way that the conservation committee would have been able to achieve as much as it has without Monica’s continued support. *Dave Bird*

Surprisingly, perhaps the most enduring memory I shall have of Monica will be of meeting her on so many occasions when she called in at the London Zoo to collect BHS correspondence. This unassuming lady, who seemed to know everybody and to have so many friends in the world of natural history, always seemed to me to epitomise the friendliness and shared interests of those who made the BHS what it is today. Monica Green was synonymous with the Society and its literature will never be quite the same because it does not include her name as an office-holder.

‘Mrs Green’, thank you very much for all you have done for the Society and for herpetology and for your personal support over the 47 years since we first met.
John Cooper

My initial contact with Monica Green was in 1959, when I was 15 years old and attended my first meeting of the BHS in London. ‘Mrs Green’, as I referred to her in those early days, was the person I encountered as I entered the lecture-room. She was kind and welcoming and made a young schoolboy (I was shy in those days!) feel at ease.

As well as her role as Secretary it is a little known fact that Monica performed numerous other tasks that were equally important to the running of the BHS – as our newly appointed replacement, Trevor Rose, does now. Over many years, for example, she took it upon herself to be the person responsible for packaging and distributing issues of the *Bulletin* (and at one time also the *Journal*) – many hundreds

Subsequently as a member of the BHS, I met her regularly. She knew that I hoped to train as a

of them every few months – a surely tedious job which involved at least a couple of day's work and repeated trips to the Post Office. Monica also graciously provided space in her home for the storage of an ever-increasing number of back issues, and on at least one occasion it seemed the number of boxes accumulating in the hall of her house threatened to block up the doorway. Many thanks Monica, we owe you an enormous debt of gratitude.

Peter Stafford

The Herpetological Journal - on-line

The British Herpetological Society is preparing an online subscription for Institutions, Overseas and Full UK members, to be launched fully for 2007. From January 2007, the *Herpetological Journal* will be available as an online publication through our provider, Ingenta. Initially, only the *Herpetological Journal* will be available online; the *Herpetological Bulletin* will remain in hardcopy and be delivered via surface mail. It is planned to include the *Bulletin* in the online subscription by 2008/9. In brief, the advantages to members will be faster access to publications as they are released, access to all available back-copies, and cheaper subscription. Papers will of course be available as downloads, providing all the benefits that electronic access to documents brings, such as keyword searching, filing, etc. The

Society will benefit from greater exposure of its content, including abstracts of all papers to non-members, and reduced printing and posting costs. In order for subscribing BHS members to test and check access to the services provided by Ingenta, all issues of the *Herpetological Journal* published during 2006 will be available online. Volume 15, No. 4 and Volume 16, No. 1 are available now. All BHS members (full inland, overseas and institutions) are invited to try this service to ensure error-free access. Please note you will need your membership number to gain access to online publications.

The normal postal subscription will remain in place for members wishing to continue to receive hardcopy publications. However, subscription rates are set to rise in 2007 to cover the ever-increasing postal and printing charges. The new pricing structure will be advertised in the coming months in preparation for 2007.

To view BHS *Herpetological Journal* content online, go to www.ingenta.com, and follow the instructions for registration. Your password is your membership number, and this field is case-sensitive. Institutional members please note a covering letter has been sent with this issue of the *Herpetological Bulletin* containing notification of your subscriber (membership) number.

Trevor Rose, BHS Secretary



OBITUARY

Leigh George Gillett

29th October 1958 – 6th October 2005

Leigh Gillett, a well-known naturalist and long term supporter of the BHS, sadly lost his battle with cancer on 6th October 2005. He remained an active Council member until shortly before his death, and in many ways typified the naturalist-herpetologist that laid the foundations upon which the present-day Society is based. Leigh served a fairly typical herpetological apprenticeship. As a

schoolboy, he spent much of his time ferreting around in ponds and ditches for assorted creatures, which were carried home triumphantly in jam jars and sandwich boxes. After gaining scholarships to Kent College and then Magdalen College, Oxford, Leigh gained a degree in mathematics and realised his long-standing ambition to become a school teacher. Given his passion for the natural world and outstanding intellect, he was often asked why he didn't take zoology at Oxford. His answer was always the same. This would have meant that he

take A-level zoology at school, which – at the time – required all pupils to dissect a frog: something he refused to do. Although in later life he worked closely with many scientists, to Leigh amphibian and reptiles were animals to be revered and enjoyed, not exploited for the benefit of science or humankind.

Leigh indulged his passion for wildlife by converting his home and garden into a haven for reptiles and amphibians. In addition to several spacious outdoor vivaria and greenhouses containing many species personally collected by Leigh on his numerous overseas field trips, his garden also contained wild slow-worms, viviparous lizards, grass snakes, common frogs and all three newt species. Peer in through the living room window and the eyes would feast on a North American desert habitat – complete with indigenous herpetofauna – rather than a three-piece suite and TV.

However, Leigh's interest in the natural world flowed well beyond reptiles and amphibians. He was probably the best all-round field naturalist I have ever met, and possessed an encyclopaedic knowledge of the distribution and habitats of all sorts of animals and plants. When I moved to the University of Kent in 1990, Leigh was invaluable in providing information about local sites that could be usefully harnessed for ecology and conservation teaching and research. Indeed, he became a valued friend and colleague not just to me personally, but to a whole generation of students and researchers who have pursued herpetological research projects over the past 15 years.

Leigh was elected to the first of several terms on BHS Council in 1991. With his broad-based herpetological interests, sharp mind and easy-going personality, Leigh was seen as someone who truly had the Society's values and philosophy close to his heart. His wise counsel and balanced views were always worth listening to. He took a particular interest in the Society's publications, and frequently highlighted to me the grammatical shortcomings of many of the papers published in the *Herpetological Journal*. This led to his



appointment as Associate Editor with responsibilities for proof-reading and correction of English, a post that he filled with great dedication and efficiency until his failing health made him unable to continue. There are many herpetologists throughout the world – some of them eminent scientists – who owe a debt of gratitude to Leigh for improving the quality of their written work. Leigh also valued the social side of the Society, and after meetings he was instrumental in encouraging members to continue herpetological discussions over a beer and a curry.

Because he pursued herpetology for pleasure, Leigh was not a prolific publisher of his own herpetological work. Nevertheless, he was widely respected both in Britain and overseas, and a frequent delegate at scientific meetings. He would be pleased to know that the majority of his personal herpetological library has been deposited with the BHS for the long-term benefit of people with similar interests. His legacy will therefore live on, although herpetological natural history will be a much poorer place without him.

Richard A. Griffiths

The Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology.