

Obituary

RAYMOND PAUL BOWMAN
(1931-1999)

It was with much sadness and some shock that naturalists (particularly, but not only, in Hampshire) learnt of the sudden death of Paul (as he was known to us), on Calshot Spit on the Hampshire coast in July 1999. He had gone there to count the estuary birds and to record the local flora, and suffered a heart attack on this very hot day, apparently after a swim.

Paul was born in Hythe, Hampshire, on the east side of the New Forest, in 1931. His remarkable mother Dorothy was born near Exbury on the south-east edge of the New Forest. When he was three years old, the family (which came to include his four younger sisters, June, Dawn, Wendy and Heather) moved to the Maybush district of north-west Southampton, but summer holidays were nearly always spent at the caravan at Longdown, on the edge of the Forest, south east of Ashurst. His mother describes how his schoolboy passion for wildlife blossomed at an early age. Tragically, at the age of 15, an infection of meningitis destroyed his hearing. This disaster had a profound influence on his lifestyle, and focused his interests even more on wildlife. Though best known later as a botanist, he patiently and methodically studied the bird life with binoculars, as of course he could not hear their calls, and became an outstanding ornithologist. He was a member of the Southampton NHS and Hants Ornithological Society for over 40 years, and the Recorder of the NHS for over 20. His skills as a field worker were outstanding - indeed quite exceptional - in the effort he expended in verifying records.

Sadly, he never learnt to lip-read effectively (except within his own family) so although he was by nature a most outgoing and sociable person, communication with other naturalists was *not* easy. He could tell others all he wanted to say, but they had to write things down in reply.

He became a quite outstanding botanist with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the flora of South Hampshire. As a member of the Botanical Society of the British Isles, his knowledge and meticulous work led to him being appointed botanical Vice-County Recorder for South Hants (v.c. 11), a post he held for 20 years until his death. When the work on the *Flora of Hampshire* was revived after various misfortunes, he became one of the three co-authors of this book (published eventually in 1996) with Lady Anne Brewis and myself; and the most casual inspection of the pages of this book reveals how much work he did towards its completion; not least in the detailed distribution maps, but in his patient and meticulous care in making records. I personally think he did more work for the Flora of Hants than most of the rest of us combined! And all of an incredibly high standard.

In this period he did not neglect his ornithological studies, and every October he travelled, usually to the Scilly Isles, to take part in annual bird migration counts - incredibly without being able to hear a single bird song.

Professionally he worked as a draughtsman and cartographer with the Ordnance Survey at Southampton. It is clear that his professional work in this field was of the same outstanding quality as his natural history work, and his work was recognised by the award of the British Empire Medal. His cartographic skills were of great help in his botanical work, and he helped much with the geographical and mapping aspects of the *Flora of Hampshire*. Unlike many botanists I know (some quite eminent!), if Paul gave you a grid reference you knew you could rely on it implicitly. He was a very good and patient photographer - some of his photos are included in the Hants Flora, and are superb.

His ready smile and amiable, enthusiastic personality managed to shine through his severe disability, particularly during the protracted (and sometimes heated!) arguments that developed in committee during the gestation of the Flora. He took all these problems in his stride, with his excellent sense of humour. As soon as he was given brief written notes of what was actually going on in committee, he 'cottoned-on' instantly to the problems and was always very helpful.

He was a botanist of reputation well beyond Hampshire, and had extensive correspondence with naturalists all over Britain.

Apart from his work as a naturalist and, above all, as a botanist, he has permanent memorials not only in the published Hants Flora, but in the horsetail hybrid, *Equisetum* × *bowmanii* C. N. Page (*E. sylvaticum* L. × *E. telmateia* Ehrh.) named after him by the pteridologist Dr C. N. Page. He found this hybrid, new to science, in 1986 in the northern part of the New Forest. It is still there, but it has not yet been found outside the New Forest, (Page 1987 - *Watsonia* **17**: 273–277).

I found Paul to be a lovable personality and a great naturalist whom we miss very much in botanical circles in Hampshire.

FRANCIS ROSE