Birds in Wales 17-1 text.qxp_Layout 1 27/08/2020 13:03 Page 69

Obituary
Peter Hope Jones, 1935-2020

Welsh ornithology and nature conservation lost an influential and highly productive figure with the death of Peter Hope Jones on 13 July 2020, aged 85. Peter (or Peter Hope as he always announced himself) combined the precision of a scientist with a poetic sensibility. He influenced a generation of naturalists as much through his unique combination of personal qualities as through his work. He exhibited a vulnerability born of his struggles with depression, an engaging and giving personality, always looking for things to do for others and a thoughtfulness which connected the detail of any subject under discussion with a holistic and philosophical turn of mind.

Peter was brought up in Prestatyn, close to the mouth of the Dee estuary. His mother Menna came from Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant, where his father Stan worked for the Midland Bank until he was called up for war service. Peter's secondary education was at Rhyl Grammar School. He had a clear tenor voice, and one year trained and conducted his House Choir in the school Eisteddfod. Out of school he 'lived on his bike', and took up birdwatching, influenced by finding Edmund Sandars' Bird Book for the Pocket on his Taid's shelves. Several close school friends also enjoyed the outdoor life with him, and he spent many school holidays with his mother's relatives on farms near Llanrhaeadr. In October 1953 he arrived at UCNW Bangor to study Forestry. There, he soon became involved with the Bangor Bird Group, and began wildfowl counts on Anglesey's lakes and estuaries. He also played hockey for the College 1st XI, and in later years had trials for the Welsh team. Sadly, he suffered from clinical depression near the end of his second year and had to drop out.

In March 1956 he became Assistant Warden at the Observatory on Fair Isle, where the Warden, Peter Davis, had just arrived from Skokholm. Peter Hope completed two seasons on Fair Isle, gaining an excellent grounding in ornithology, especially ringing and migration studies. His next posting, in 1958, was as a volunteer in the Camargue, helping with the ringing work at the Tour du Valat Research Station, owned and run by Dr Luc Hoffmann. This included some weeks in the Swiss Alps and on the Spanish coast. In June 1960 Peter was appointed the Nature Conservancy's Warden Naturalist for Newborough Warren, where his work included protecting breeding Montagu's Harriers. He became friendly with the wildlife artist Charles Tunnicliffe, finding recently dead birds on the beaches for Charles to use as specimens for his illustrations and paintings. He also befriended Jill Wild who visited Newborough with a Conservation Corps group, and they married in 1964. The following year Peter moved to Meirionnydd as Warden Naturalist, with nine National Nature Reserves under his wing. He monitored their bird populations and published the results. He even found time to join, and help run, the local Mountain Rescue Team. In 1968 he was awarded a Winston Churchill Memorial Award, which enabled him to spend two months in the USA studying wildlife conservation and management.

His work for NCC came to an abrupt end around 1973 when Jill asked for a divorce, and the resultant stress caused his resignation. His book Birds of Merioneth, published by the Cambrian Ornithological Society in 1974, was the first county avifauna for Meirionnydd, and this was followed in 1976 by Birds of Caernarvonshire, written with Peter Dare, again the first avifauna for the county. In 1976 he was appointed by RSPB as a seabird ecologist on Orkney, where he established a set of cliff sites suitable for annual monitoring, and a recording system for beached seabirds. At the end of this contract he went to Brittany to help with studies on seabirds caught up in the Amoco Cadiz wreck,

Birds in Wales 17-1 text.qxp_Layout 1 27/08/2020 13:03 Page 70

followed by work in Pembrokeshire when the Christos Bitas was grounded. He then spent three years based in Aberdeen as part of a four-man NCC Seabirds at Sea team. They spent as much time at sea as possible; in Peter's case, this included five weeks on a rig attached to Brent Bravo in Autumn 1979. His observations on bird migration seen from the rig were published in British Birds.

In 1982 an attack of endocarditis (probably linked to rheumatic fever in his youth) left him hospitalised for some weeks, and he returned to Prestatyn to recuperate. The following year he moved to Menai Bridge where Bangor's research vessel Prince Madog was based and took part in counts of seabirds and cetaceans in the Irish Sea. Peter married Joan Lewis in 1985. He also spent much time on Ynys Enlli (Bardsey), including 12 months during 1984-85. He had been an obsessive collector of references about Bardsey since 1959 and edited the Bird Observatory's Report from 1970 to 1999. Whilst on the island, he worked on The Natural History of Bardsey, which was published by the National Museum of Wales in 1988. It remains the best general introduction to the island's wildlife. Ten years later Gomer published Between Sea and Sky, a superb collection of Peter's photographs from Bardsey; accompanying each is a quotation from the poetry of his friend R.S. Thomas, who was Vicar of Aberdaron and visited Bardsey frequently.

In Spring 1986 Peter began a project for the RSPB on the status and ecology of Black Grouse in Wales, using a base near Bala. After writing up the following year, his health prevented him from continuing, because of the arduous fieldwork involved. In October 1987 he enrolled in the College of Librarianship in Aberystwyth (as the oldest in a class of 80 students), and in 1990 submitted a Master's thesis on the feasibility of creating a wildlife database for Wales. By then, he had rejoined NCC in Bangor as Monitoring Ecologist, and set up a team of a dozen workers for what became CCW's monitoring programme. He pioneered the use of fixed-point photography, developing a technique which captured the subtleties of habitat change and demonstrated his photographic skills and eye for detail.

In 1988 the Welsh Ornithological Society was formed and Peter was its first Chairman. He resigned, for personal reasons in 1990.

In 1993 heart surgery became necessary; after a pacemaker was installed, he finally retired in 1994. By then he and Joan were happily ensconced in The Hide, a small house in Menai Bridge. Retirement allowed him to continue writing, including (with Ian Bonner) a Contribution to the Flora of Bardsey published by CCW in 2002. His next project - Birds of Anglesey, Adar Môn - (with Paul Whalley) finished up as a very large book. In 2001 in an article published in the then new wildlife journal Natur Cymru he wrote about the spirituality of nature reserves such as Bardsey, which for him was a product of ethics and human consciousness rather than theistic religion. He argued that nature reserves could add immeasurably to human well-being as sources of beauty and naturalness.

Perhaps it came a little too late, but presentation (by Iolo Williams) of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Welsh Ornithological Society in 2012 was very appropriate. The citation mentioned his work on seabirds, including monitoring oiling disasters, and a total of 148 publications; it finished by referring to him as 'this most modest of men'. Incredibly hard-working, conscientious well beyond the call of duty, he was great company and an inspiration to friends and colleagues. His achievements were limited only by the number of hours in the day and, sadly, by bouts of illness.

Joan died in 2014. He is survived by his sister Margaret (Marty) and his brother Ron.

Geoff Gibbs