

EDITORIAL

In every county there are a few naturalists whose published contributions to its ecology are of overwhelming weight. We devote this Editorial to a commemoration of two of Somerset's greatest contributors.

Ernest Neal writes in the 'In gratia' of his autobiography *Badger Man* of 'the gift of curiosity concerning some of nature's mysteries, and for deep feelings of awe and wonder at the majesty of it all.' This expresses a feeling to which we can all, as naturalists, respond. We owe a special debt to Dr Ernest Neal as founder chairman of the Somerset Wildlife Trust and for his dedicated work on badgers, so much a part of the Somerset countryside. Starting life as a butterfly man, a chance encounter fired his lasting interest in badgers; they even contributed to his doctoral thesis. However, his interests spread widely and were to inspire many children during his teaching career at Taunton School. He made wildlife films for the BBC, served on English Nature's advisory committee for England and on the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food badgers and TB panel. He also led safaris to Africa. He wrote some fascinating books, including *Uganda Quest* and *The Badger*, culminating in his recent autobiography, reviewed elsewhere in this journal. Throughout his life, Ernest Neal's devotion to his family, and his religious convictions, have shown a man concerned with values that spilled over into conservation and care for wildlife.

Captain R.G.B. O'Neil Roe's interest in plants started at a very early age, his mother being a keen gardener. Later, as a schoolboy, he lived with an aunt and spent much of his time collecting rabbit food in the lanes for his aunt's Belgian hares. He collected pressed specimens of the plants in the lanes to learn the names. Shortly after the war he met several keen botanists who lived near his home in Devonshire, including the celebrated Revd W. Keble-Martin, and it was in 1956 that he joined the Botanical Society of the British Isles. He went on several field meetings with them and met Dr F.H. Perring who was in charge of the Society's Distribution Map Scheme. This involved a survey of the whole country. He became very interested in the project and using the same method arranged a survey of the area around Bath, later extended to the whole county of Somerset for his famous Flora. He took over the task of v.c. Botanical Recorder for North Somerset from A.D. Hallam in 1965 and from 1979 for both North and South Somerset. During that time he supplied botanical records to the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society and participated actively on the Natural History Committee, leading many field meetings. He continued as recorder until 1993 when Paul and Ian Green took over. They have the great benefit of all his county records.

We must be grateful to the Admiralty for the appointment that brought Captain Roe to Somerset in the first place. The county has much to thank him for.