

OBITUARY: GRAHAM RIX 1936–2014

Members of the natural history committee were deeply saddened to learn of the death of Graham Rix on 29 July, following a long illness borne with bravery and good humour. We greatly valued the contribution that Graham made to our committee and to the life of the Society in general. His breadth, and depth, of knowledge was remarkable, as was his willingness to share that knowledge with others. We will long remember his winter talks to the Society which in recent years included such diverse topics as 'sea dragons', the vegetation and management history of Street Heath, and the evolution of primates. The last of these he illustrated using as 'props' his extraordinary collection of primate skulls. Graham was also a regular contributor to our summer field meetings, which included helping Philip Radford with our annual Fungal Foray. The last field meeting he attended was on a gloriously sunny day in June 2013 when we visited Priddy Mineries in search of dragonflies, and in particular the rare Downy Emerald.

Graham was actively involved with the Somerset Wildlife Trust too. For many years he sat on SWT Council, and was a chair of the Peat Moors Advisory Group. He was also a member (and former secretary) of the Somerset Invertebrates Group. For the Trust he was a long-serving reserve



manager for both Street Heath and Sharpham Moor Plot reserves, the latter being the original location in Britain for the rare hybrid sedge *Carex x evoluta*. Sharpham Moor Plot, in particular, always held a special attraction for Graham. He felt its historical significance as keenly as anyone: it was, after all, the first site to be purchased and managed as a nature reserve in S.W. England, and only the second in Britain, being bought for £45 by A.G. Tansley and H. Stuart Thompson in 1923 and then given to the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves (later the Royal Society for Nature Conservation). The reserve passed to the Somerset Wildlife Trust in 1999. Graham wrote an account of Sharpham Moor Plot for the Society's splendid volume *The Somerset Wetlands* (2006), which he also helped to edit, and to which he contributed many photographs.

Apart from documenting the wildlife and ecology of the two reserves in great detail, Graham also used 'the Plot' as an outdoor laboratory for his students. His concern for the reserves was always to the fore, especially when commercial peat extraction on adjoining areas led to a lowering of the water table – an aspect of the ecology of these sites that he monitored closely. The current restoration works to reverse the drying out of these sites would have interested him greatly, and one can imagine him following such developments with a biologist's eye, always on the look-out for the return of plants such as Round-leaved Sundew, one of a number of acid mire species that flourished on Street Heath when he first knew that site.

Graham was born on 18 August 1936 in Wanstead, Essex. Between 1947 and 1954 he attended a grammar school in West Ham, and during that time he became involved with London Zoo, and was even on the payroll there for a while. At the Zoo he was allowed to rummage through the bins to find the heads of dead animals, the skulls of which he then carefully prepared back in the school's science laboratory. This proved to be the start of a lifelong interest in the structure and 'inner workings' of a wide range of animals, resulting in a huge collection of skulls and other specimens.

In 1954 he went to Aberystwyth where he studied Zoology, Botany and Geology. After graduating he had a spell as a supply teacher at schools in Bridgwater and Taunton, and then enrolled on a teacher-training course in Cardiff. On qualifying as a teacher Graham got a job at Midsomer Norton

Grammar School – later a Comprehensive – and spent the whole of his working life there, retiring in 1993. Graham married in 1964, and he and Rosemary lived in Wells for twenty-two years before moving to Glastonbury in 1986.

As many of his former students would doubtless testify, Graham's curiosity about the natural world was infectious. He was a veritable storehouse of information, just as his own home became, literally, a storehouse for his collections – not just skulls, but rocks and fossils and books too. He was a keen and highly skilled photographer; the slide collection that he and Rosemary have kindly donated to the Society must amount to more than ten-thousand images. Graham also left SANHS a large number of books; some of these have been added to our collection at the Somerset Heritage Centre, while others are to form the core of a new library for naturalists at the Avalon Marshes Centre.

Graham was unfailingly generous with the time and energy he gave to our committee. His views were quietly but strongly held, and he always felt it important to get things *right*; and in a kind and gentle, yet persistent, way he would happily point out when he felt we'd got them wrong! It's important to have people on whom you can depend in a crisis, and Graham was such a person. We miss him greatly.

He is survived by his wife, Rosemary, their three children and seven grandchildren.

DAVID REID and SIMON LEACH

I would like to add a brief personal tribute. I knew Graham as a friend and a naturalist, first meeting him at Society gatherings, often those to which he was contributing. If I had problems with identifying an insect, lichen or fungus, I would send Graham a description or a photograph. He would usually know what it was; and even if he didn't, there would always be a helpful discussion on the matter by letter or by telephone.

Graham must have been a first-class school teacher. He had a wide range of knowledge, a deep love of the natural world and, above all, an enquiring mind. He was also an excellent companion in the field. I recall one enjoyable walk with him around my village churchyard. We examined the gravestones for lichens, while also paying attention to the local botany and passing birds, and the many interesting features of the ancient church itself. As expected, he was keen to take photographs of all items of interest.

It was the broad picture of life that appealed to Graham. I will certainly miss him, as will many others with an interest in our county's natural history.

PHILIP RADFORD