

OBITUARY

PAD Hollom

Phil Hollom (1912–2014, Plate 1), gentle Phil. Quiet, somewhat shy, great fun and good company. A twinkling eye, wicked sense of humour and rather boyish, slightly coy, smile masked a remarkable determination and pioneering spirit. His seemingly diffident approach belied a steely man of vision and achievement in the neglected fields of bird identification and distribution. If you had asked him what his favourite part of the world was, he would surely have replied, ‘the Middle East.’

Other obituaries have done great justice to Phil’s long, very full life and great achievements (see *eg* that by Ian Wallace in December 2014 *British Birds*), so here I will concentrate on the contribution he made to Middle East ornithology. However, one earlier achievement outside that region deserves special mention. Those of us venturing to the Middle East prior to the 1980s had precious little bird identification material to consult. Although it only extended to the Turkish/

Greek border, *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* with Guy Mountfort and artist, Roger Tory Peterson, first published in 1954, was an essential companion. Translated into 12 languages, and with a number of revised editions, it set the standard for future bird guides and, for at least four decades, was *the* book to carry in the field.

Ever keen to make identification material available to the generation of birdwatchers who were then starting to travel outside Europe, Phil translated Etchecopar & Hue’s *Les Oiseaux du Nord de l’Afrique* (1964) into English and so *The Birds of North Africa* swiftly followed in 1967. He had planned also to translate their *Les Oiseaux du Proche et du Moyen Orient* into English, but instead, in 1988, found himself the senior author of *Birds of the Middle East and North Africa*. Later, when *Birds of the Middle East* (a comprehensive guide solely devoted to the Middle East) was being hatched, Phil declined an offer to be a co-author as he was heavily committed to the nine volume *Birds of the Western Palearctic* (BWP), as well as then being an octogenarian. So the authors paid tribute to him: *Dedicated to PAD Hollom, a pioneer of modern bird identification and a friend of the Middle East*.

Phil travelled widely in the region on ornithological expeditions (Plate 2). Favourites were remoter parts of Turkey and Iran (where in the early 1970s he travelled on the plane sporting fashionably flared trousers). In 1963 he was a member of the



Plate 1. Phil Hollom, Iran, May 1968 (photographer unknown).



Plate 2. Phil Hollom (right) and Stanley Cramp surveying the now drained Amik Golu, southeast Turkey, May 1970. © RF Porter



Plate 3. Phil Hollom sound recording at dawn from his sleeping bag, southern Turkey, May 1970. © RF Porter



Plate 4. Phil Hollom sound recording at Mashad, Iran, April 1972. © RF Porter

expedition to Jordan which resulted in his close friend Guy Mountfort's book, *Portrait of a Desert*. Phil took part in all these early 'Mountfort' expeditions, which kindled the urge to travel in many of us, I know it did me. Two decades later, in 1985, he took part in the Ornithological Society of the Middle East's expedition to North Yemen, playing football against a local children's team up at 3000 m in the spectacular backdrop of the mountains of Mahwit.

Going back further to his flying days in the second world war, he used to bring back boxes of dates from North Africa for the legendary, and sadly now discredited, Richard Meinertzhagen. I've often wondered how Phil felt about the Colonel's fraudulent activities once they were exposed. I never asked him, but I suspect being the gentleman that he was, he would have kept his thoughts to himself and not joined the ranks of those condemning him.

Phil was a very keen and competent sound recordist (Plates 3 & 4) and in later years recording bird vocalisations became his main focus in the field. The many sonograms in BWP pay tribute to this.

Soon after the Ornithological Society of Turkey was launched in 1968, Phil joined

its council and later became chairman of its records and editorial committee, which published the first OST bird reports and the *Check List of the Birds of Turkey* (1971). When the OST evolved into OSME in 1978, Phil was made a vice-president, and then joined OSME's council and editorial committee in 1990. Many an OST and OSME council meeting and AGM were held in the boardroom at Bowmaker House in London, where Phil would modestly describe his day-job as 'playing around with a little banking!'

Let's go back to 1959 when the British Birds' Rarities Committee was established, a jury of ten to assess reports of rare birds in Britain. Phil was its mentor and first chairman. Now, some 55 years later many rarities committees have been established around the world based on the workings and principles of BBRC, seven at least in the Middle East. Their role? I suggest 'to maintain standards.' Of that Phil would have been proud.

To me he was a good friend, an entertaining travelling companion, an excellent host, a mentor. A true English gentleman.

Richard Porter