

illustrate the proposed *Birds of Africa*. The rest, as they say, is history.

A very quick totalling of his published illustrations (including those in *Handbook of the Birds of the World*) shows he painted close to 4,000 species. That's two fifths of all the species in the world. I don't believe that any other artist can claim that.

As well as being a renowned ornithologist and wildlife artist, Martin was a fine poet, writer and pianist. With his wife, Barbara, he was an ardent traveller, notably to Africa, and they were both unstinting supporters of wildlife conservation organisations and causes. In 1993 he and friends founded the African Bird Club and became its first chairman and later President.

That aside, Martin would probably have described himself, in his most modest way, as simply a wildlife lover. And indeed he was.

### Rodney P. Martins (1957-2019)

I first met Rod in autumn 1983 at the weekly pub meetings of the Cambridge Bird Club students and from the beginning he was memorable: lean, laconic and somewhat weather-beaten, with entertaining stories of the rare birds and birding scene in the UK in the 1970s and 80s and of his recent birding experiences in Turkey and Asia. I soon realised that Rod was not only a leading UK birder, with a list near 400, and with a British first to his name (Rüppell's Warbler in 1977, so appropriately a Palearctic 'special'), but that he had also done a great deal of reading and study of species distribution and identification in the birding literature and had developed a wide social network of birdwatcher contacts.

As a transitional Afro-Palearctic area with relict montane avifauna (including two gamebirds), and not covered by any field guide, Yemen already fascinated Rod back then and so it was no surprise that two years later he was a member of the 1985 OSME Ornithological Expedition to North Yemen, which I had the luck also to join. We spent eight weeks in the field as part of a 13-strong team studying the bird communities, threatened species and endemics of that little-known land. The first month involved several hundred transects across the Tihamah coastal plain and each late morning, as the

He loved watching and absorbing wildlife and the wild places wildlife lives. Great fun to be with, his wry, understated sense of humour and generosity of spirit is something that really will be missed at gatherings of his family and friends. He embraced his diagnosis of incurable cancer with dignity and without an ounce of self-pity, always acknowledging the wonderful life he had been blessed with.

All Martin's important art archives, ornithological notes and letters are to be kept for posterity in the Natural History Museum at Tring, England and a memorial foundation is to be established in his memory to foster an interest in drawing and painting birds in young people, notably in Africa, India and Arabia where his illustrations were so influential.

Richard Porter



Rod Martins in the mythical Tien Shan mountains of Kyrgyzstan, May 2013. Note trademark 'gentleman's cap' as he liked to call it, rubber-bands ever-ready on wrists, and plimsolls - perfect for chasing snowcocks on the scree-slopes and snowfields just above. © Duncan Brooks

intensifying heat put an end to surveying, we would retire to the nearest village and enjoy

an ice-cold fizzy drink, with Rod smoking his characteristic roll-up (with tobacco, notebook and biro stashed in his combat-trouser pocket) and making droll small-talk on life, events and debatable birds, as well as giving help and ID tips to such 'beginners' as myself. Rod co-authored the systematic list that resulted from the Expedition, the first such summary of the national avifauna, as well as a paper on Golden-winged Grosbeak, which he infused with his characteristic interest in taxonomy and evolutionary origins.

Rod was a committed supporter of OSME from at least 1981 onwards and he became a Life Member. He served five years on OSME Council from 1986 and was then a co-opted member until 2005, active on the Editorial Committee of Sandgrouse but specialising as Turkey Bird Report editor during nearly all of that 20-year period. He was responsible for editing or co-editing four such TBRs (each covering a 5-year period), sifting through countless trip reports and submitted records to build up a clearer picture of the status of bird species in Turkey, also co-authoring the Turkey Checklist that was published as Sandgrouse Supplement 1 in 1999. During 1991-1993 he was also the valued OSME representative on the Steering Committee of BirdLife International's IBAs of the Middle East project.

In spring 1993 Rod was again a full-time member of the second OSME Expedition to Yemen, this time including a visit to Socotra, which he would have savoured as a connoisseur of islands and their endemics. The expedition's results were published in Sandgrouse 17 (which Rod co-edited) and he was also author or co-author of nine of the papers therein, including one on the enigmatic Socotra Buzzard. In 2001 he was able to again visit Socotra to do further bird surveys as part of a Darwin-Initiative-funded conservation project.

On top of his fieldcraft, Rod could also display considerable charm and organisational skills when called for and so, during the 1980s and 90s, he was an occasional leader for top bird-tour companies, to Yemen and elsewhere, such as the joint OSME/Sunbird trip to Yemen in spring 1998. On two such tours to Yemen in the springs of 1986 & 1987 he found the first and second documented nests of Arabian

Accentor (with chicks and eggs respectively) and was able to compare them with the nest and nestlings of Radde's Accentor that he had found in eastern Turkey three years earlier, an example of the rich store of field experience he had built up in these and other 'target' countries (he found the nests/nestlings extremely similar, and subsequently expanded on other similarities between the two taxa in a photo ID article in Sandgrouse – the species are now lumped by some authorities, e.g. HBW/BirdLife). On these tours he was also able to follow up on the original OSME expeditions in monitoring species such as Northern Bald Ibis and Arabian Bustard at their various non-publicised locations and report back to BirdLife International, as well as to gather further data on the endemics, which he published in two papers in OSME Bulletin.

He was a regular at the OSME annual meetings and at the British Bird Fairs at Rutland, giving several talks. As a global birder, Rod was fascinated by avian biogeography and published with Erik Hirschfeld a paper in Sandgrouse in 1998 on the limits of the Western Palaearctic within the OSME region, which he also delivered as a talk at the British Ornithologists Club.

In the late 1990s Rod worked as a volunteer on BirdLife's massive *Threatened Birds of the World* book (the 2000 Red List), researching and bringing together the literature on all of the Middle East species and compiling the species accounts for Yemen Thrush, Yemen Warbler and Arabian Accentor, as well as authoring the ID texts for all Middle Eastern species. He subsequently wrote at least one article for BirdLife's World Birdwatch magazine.

Rod was a formidable field birder, seemingly a rarity magnet, but beyond the standard qualities that explain this, such as excellent eyesight and hearing, a restless mobility, a penchant for reading and research before the trip, and a stamina for long hours in the field, he seemed to have that lucky 'sixth sense' that not all of us have, perhaps explained as an instinct for immediately sensing 'difference' in glimpsed or distant birds, and perseverance in following them up. Rod often preferred to head off independently and cover ground rather than bird in a group

or sit-and-wait, but was always keen to share his good finds with other observers. Carrying whistles was a must, with one blast a contact call, two meaning 'something good' and three 'target acquired'.

In Yemen in 1985 I well remember his hurried arrival back at base camp to announce his discovery of Olive Pigeon, a wonderfully unexpected addition to the Yemen list, and his subsequent success in leading a large, somewhat excited group of us across difficult terrain to view these flighty birds. Never known to wear sturdy footwear, when confronted by difficult habitat Rod had no compunction about wading into marshland or thorn scrub, whether wearing his characteristic plimsolls or 'gentleman's loafers'. Even before becoming a tour leader, Rod was good at guiding 'colleagues' (as he jokily referred to fellow trip participants) onto the bird that he was watching, and advised us on how to improve in this art. Once a bird was located Rod would often list the key features that we needed to be looking for, which was both useful and impressive. Trips with Rod were also characterised, in vehicle, by a constant soundtrack of Miles Davis and John McLoughlin, two artists he never tired of listening to.

Beyond OSME and BirdLife, perhaps Rod's greatest contribution to ornithology and bird conservation came through his being a prime mover in mobilising the UK and wider birding community to establish the other 'regional' bird clubs, that came after OSME – OBC, ABC and NBC - which have achieved so much worldwide via their conservation funds and publications.

Not one of the herd, sticking to his life-time base of Norwich, and yet with a wealth of birding friends and connections throughout the world, Rod had a voluminous address and phone book, and if he had adopted social media (he had little interest in using computers, email or the internet), I imagine he could have had a very large number of 'followers', eager for the next comment or debate. Though I did not meet or catch up with Rod in recent years, one always wanted to hear news of him and what he was up to. His untimely passing leaves the birding world a poorer place, but his name and his wonderfully individual personality and character will surely live on among all who knew him.

*Mike Evans*