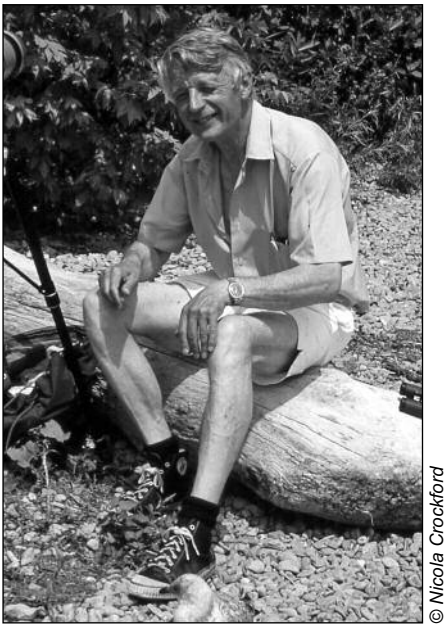
OBITUARY

HUGH BOYD 1925–2016



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Having read zoology, microbiology and chemistry at Bristol University after service with the Royal Navy in 1943/44, Hugh Boyd became Warden of the Lundy Bird Observatory (then part of the UK Bird Observatories Network) in 1948. Hugh wasted no time in setting up a system for recording the island's bird life: a daily 'cruise', a walk of a little under four miles each morning around the southern half of the island, covering in particular the south-eastern slopes which provide most of the vegetative cover on the island. Its aim was to provide numerical records of resident and migrant birds for comparative use year on year. Looking back at Hugh's logbooks of that time, it remains clear to this day that he set the bar very high in the recording of the island's bird life. Ringing too was a significant part of the Warden's job, concentrating mainly on nestlings and cliff-nesting seabirds, but also passerines caught in the small Heligoland trap erected in the garden adjacent to the Old Light in 1949.

Lundy's loss was Sir Peter's Scott's considerable gain when, after completing a second year on Lundy, Hugh moved to become the first resident biologist at the Severn Wildfowl Trust (now Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust) at Slimbridge. Here, Hugh was instrumental in developing the technique of rocket-netting for the capture of geese. Through pioneering the use of this method to capture waders, wader ringing was instantly revolutionized, massively increasing shorebird catch totals for migration studies.

Hugh continued to contribute to the study of birds on Lundy through various papers published in LFS Annual Reports. These covered counts of nesting seabirds, growth of nestling Shags, gull population studies, and ringing studies of Guillemots and Razorbills. His compilation of bird notes extracted from the Heaven diaries (Annual Report 4, 1950) were extremely helpful in the making of *The Birds of Lundy* (2007), as was his recollection of Lundy's sole record of a Roller, which he came across on the morning of 25 August 1949. In his description of the bird, Hugh wrote: "Though its plumage lacked a little of the brilliance of the male in breeding plumage, the beauty of the bird in flight was unforgettable – a combination of kingfisher-blue, chestnut and black."

In 1967, after two years at the Nature Conservancy, Hugh took up a post as Research Manager for the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) Eastern Region. Here, he oversaw the expansion of CWS interests from mainly waterfowl to seabirds, shorebirds and even passerines (the "twittering bird" business, as he put it). He moved to CWS headquarters in Ottawa to serve as Director of the Migratory Birds Branch from 1975–1980, where he was influential in developing many national and international waterbird conservation initiatives. His conservation legacy is enormous

– Hugh had been one of the originators of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat when he represented the UK on the International Waterfowl Research Bureau (now Wetlands International), and he also played a key role in Canada joining the Convention.

During his subsequent time at CWS, Hugh served as Senior Policy Advisor, Senior Scientist, Acting Director of CWS Ontario Region, and Chief of Migratory Birds Research, enabling him to spend more time on his chief love, research, which he continued after his retirement in 1981 as a Scientist Emeritus with CWS. During and after his long and successful career, he published over 180 papers and three books – his paper on shorebird survival, published in the journal *Ibis* in 1962, became the classic reference on this subject for decades and remains the only source of annual survival estimates of some species to the present day.

Hugh was a 'modest, kind and gentle' man, above all a true gentleman. His dry sense of humour and sometimes acerbic wit, coupled with his enthusiasm, honesty and perspective on bird matters were refreshing and uplifting. In 2007, during his last visit to Lundy some 60 years after his stint as Warden, when asked to describe life in the Old Light observatory, Hugh pondered his response for a full minute before uttering a single encapsulating word: "Damp!" At a time when it became fashionable in government circles to speak of conservation as a 'business' serving its constituent 'clients' (the public), Hugh would quietly point out the real 'clients' were the birds.

Throughout his life, Hugh actively supported and encouraged younger scientists and colleagues. His influence on 'the next generation' is legendary. In the early 1970s, when one young CWS shorebird researcher floated the idea of fieldwork as far north as Ellesmere Island and as far south as Tierra del Fuego in one year, he was met with a steady gaze and words to the effect 'go for it'. Around the same time, Hugh accompanied another aspiring young biologist to study Greater Snow Geese on Bylot Island, northern Canada. The two ringed a small flock of Brant Geese off the north-west coast of Devon Island, some of which were later recovered (at great surprise to both) on the east coast of Northern Ireland. Hugh's own enthusiasm for fieldwork remained strong even during his administrative years. He took part in CWS shorebird research in the Arctic in the Foxe Basin during the 1980s and was still climbing in and out of helicopters to do aerial surveys of geese in the 1990s. One of his great loves was Iceland, inspired by his early years working with Peter Scott in the central highlands, and this association continued late into his life, including a research trip to Iceland to celebrate his 80th birthday surrounded by friends and Icelandic ornithologists.

Hugh Boyd was a true pioneer and a giant in the world of waterbird research and conservation. He received a number of awards, including the first Peter Scott Medal for his exceptional contributions to wildfowl and wetland conservation on two continents, and his achievements were recognized when he was appointed as a Member of the Order of Canada. He died aged 91 on 3 July 2016, leaving a rich legacy of important international conservation initiatives and a generation of scientists and biologists inspired by his example. He is survived by his wife, Gillian, and by their three sons.

TIM DAVIS & TIM JONES

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