
Dr ELAINE REBECCA BULLARD M.B.E (1915–2011)

Elaine Bullard, Founder Member and President of Orkney Field Club died on the 10th of August at the age of 96. Elaine devoted the greater part of her life to recording Orkney's botanical heritage and raised a new awareness of the importance of its conservation; Orkney has been fortunate to have many distinguished botanists who have painstakingly explored its many islands and meticulously investigated and recorded its varied plant life. Few, if any however, can match the thoroughness and detail with which Elaine explored and recorded the Orkney flora for over half a century, personally visiting every possible habitat that might yield more information, not just for Orkney but also for neighbouring Caithness. From the tops and gullies of Hoy, to all the geos, inlets, marshes, bogs and lochs, Elaine searched out their plants, recording not just the species, but also all the possible hybrids and any other novelties that might have escaped the notice of less gifted, or less observant naturalists. Weather was seldom an obstacle, as she travelled around Orkney and beyond in an old Reliant three-wheeler, onto which she had constructed a makeshift tent. The Botanical Society of the British Isles could not have had a more active and efficient Official Recorder, a post she held with great credit and distinction for 46 years!

Elaine also travelled south to many BSBI Conferences and Recorders' meetings. Her enthusiasm and detailed interest in the subjects discussed and her cheerful outlook will long be remembered.

Elaine came to Orkney shortly after the war and worked as a milk recorder. However at the age of 45 she retired from this type of recording to devote herself to an interest she said she had since she was a 10-year-old, namely recognising plants and naming them accurately. As she herself said. "If you can't name a thing accurately how can you go back to it again and tell somebody else anything about it?" An outstanding feature of Elaine's

botanizing was her energetic and unrelenting capacity for exploration. Taking cognisance of the fact that plant life of Orkney might suffer from insular isolation she made particular point of comparing Orkney habitants with those of Caithness.

Her painstaking field studies went beyond merely recording and locating species but involved also revisiting and assessing change. This aspect of her work assumed ever-greater importance in recent times, as changes in land-use and climate variation repeatedly present problems for conservation and biodiversity. Consequently, this extra dimension that was added to many of her records has given them a special ecological value. One particular study of *Primula scotica* carried out at Yesnaby with H.D.G Shearer involved revisiting marked locations several times a season for over 16 years. Such a record was invaluable in providing an understanding of the vicissitudes of modern life for Scotland's only endemic species and provided information that was invaluable for evaluating conservation policy for this threatened plant.

As a founder of Orkney Field Club in 1959 and their President since 1993, and present when it celebrated its 50th birthday, Elaine played an active role in inspiring community activities in Field Studies. Members of the society were actively helped and encouraged to engage, not just in recording but in taking part in conservation projects such as planting native trees in Durkadale and helping to control invasive species from taking over and reducing the biodiversity of vulnerable natural habitats. Her regularly updated species checklists remain an invaluable legacy. The fact that she had no formal training in Botanical Science is in her case irrelevant. Over the years she has been an inspiration to visiting academics from numerous universities and institutions as well as students and their teachers and enriched their knowledge and understanding of Botany in a northern climate. Her

chapter on vegetation in “The Natural History of Orkney” edited by R.J. Berry remains a milestone in the natural history of Orkney and her checklist of the flowering plants and ferns of Orkney, first published in 1972 (and frequently updated), is still an essential reference for anyone interested in Orcadian flora

Elaine’s contribution to Orkney botany has been widely recognised – both locally and further afield. She was made an MBE in 1981

for services to nature conservation in Orkney. In 2007 Heriot-Watt University awarded her an honorary doctorate in recognition of her contribution to botany. Her passing has deprived us all of an unparalleled and probably irreplaceable font of botanical knowledge and Orkney of a unique and pioneering enthusiast for its natural heritage.

R.M.M. CRAWFORD



Elaine Bullard at the Sands of Wright, South Ronaldsay in 2005. Photo © Orkney Biodiversity Records Centre



Elaine Bullard (r) on Hoy in 1967, with the late Eddie Balfour of Hen Harrier fame & Mary Ann Thomson, at that time the Orkney County recorder for mosses, and still going at the age of 101