

OBITUARIES

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ALISTAIR COLIN GODFREY (1954–2022)

Alistair Godfrey, in his quiet and unassuming way, will be remembered as one of the leading figures in botany in Perthshire and Scotland over the last 25 years. He was joint BSBI Vice-county Recorder for Mid Perthshire and chair of the Botanical Section of the Perthshire Society of Natural Science (PSNS). A walk with Alistair was always a joy, he was always happy to talk about his love of nature and plants with his family, friends and fellow botanists. His early death on 7 December 2022 from cancer, very bravely endured, leaves a huge gap in Perthshire botany. His concern for the natural world guided him throughout his life.

Alistair was born in Stirling on 22 October 1954 and brought up in Stenhousemuir by Gordon and Margaret with his sister Janice, with whom he had a close bond all his life. An avid reader, he showed an interest in natural history from an early age. He went to Falkirk High School and then to Stirling University where he began a degree in biology but found he did not like dissecting animals and changed to a degree in English and Philosophy.

While working in Edinburgh in a solicitor's office he joined the Lothian Conservation Volunteers (LCV), closely linked to the Lothian branch of the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Experience gained with LCV influenced his future career. His friend Tim Walsh remembers him as an enthusiastic and highly valued member of the team, taking over from him as LCV Co-ordinator in April 1986. With LCV he visited many wildlife sites in the Lothians and farther afield, carrying out habitat management activities such as tree planting, path building and controlling invasive species.

Through LCV he met Rhona, on a very cold New Year 'rhodie bashing' trip to Arran in 1986 and



Alistair Godfrey, with a Dark Green Fritillary, near Tobermory, Mull, August 2013. Lynne Farrell

they married in December of that year. They moved to Gifford in East Lothian in 1986 when Alistair took a job as assistant Countryside Ranger at John Muir Country Park, and then in 1989 to Luncarty, near Perth, when Alistair became a Countryside Ranger with Perth and Kinross Council (PKC).

Their daughter Margaret was born in 1994. Alistair and Rhona parted in 2003 but remained friends.

Alistair was a Countryside Ranger with Perth and Kinross Council for 13 years, followed by 10 years managing PKC's Countryside Ranger Service, its countryside sites and infrastructure. He spent the final two years with PKC working on environmental projects, retiring in 2014. During his time with PKC he wrote woodland management plans for several popular sites, including Kinnoull Hill, the Den of Alyth and the Birks of Aberfeldy, all SSSIs, and he was involved with the Council's Forest Plan 2015–2035. He wrote the first management plan for the Inner Tay Estuary Local Nature Reserve and the draft for Perth Lade Management Plan 2011–2031, which became part of the Council's Local Development Plan. He managed and reported on a volunteer project between 1994 to 1996 setting up transects in Perth and Kinross to examine inter-relationships between Red and Grey Squirrels. As would be expected, during his time with PKC he was on many committees, including The Tayside Biodiversity working group.

A major achievement, working with Scottish Natural Heritage, the Rural Access Committee for Kinross-shire and others, was planning and establishing a long-distance trail around Loch Leven National Nature Reserve. The 21 km Loch Leven Heritage Trail now attracts over 200,000 visitors annually to the area without disturbing the outstanding wildlife around the loch.

Conservation and protection of important habitats had always been important to Alistair and much of his personal research and writing was concerned with this. He wrote an outstanding report on Glenquey Moss. This scenically beautiful area was threatened by a planning application to quarry aggregates from under the moss. His detailed species survey, mapping the complex NVC communities covering the site, proved that Glenquey Moss is a growing phase raised bog, recovering after grazing levels had been reduced. The Environmental Assessment produced by the developer described the area as degraded, heavily grazed acid grassland. His survey was instrumental in obtaining the ultimate

refusal of the quarry application by Scottish Government. He also became involved in another controversial planning issue when he wrote a very well-informed objection to the application for a golf course at Coul Links in East Sutherland, a Ramsar, Special Protection Area and SSSI. The application threatened an extensive natural sand dune system, one of the few remaining in Scotland. It was rejected by Scottish Government. Sadly the application for a golf course was resubmitted in 2023 in a slightly different guise and the fight to save Coul Links continues today.

Alistair worked closely with the Friends of the Ochils. Both were very concerned about the number of applications for forestry planting, without any assessment of their combined impact, on the Ochil Hills. He wrote detailed reports, provided lists of records from the BSBI database and carried out botanical surveys where data was missing. Single handedly, he carried out a comprehensive survey of the extent of peat on hill tops in the Ochil Hills, a daunting task when there is no easy access by roads. He showed the extent of deep peat in the centre of the Ochils is far greater than originally thought. His concern was that disturbance by ploughing areas of peat will release carbon into the atmosphere and contribute to climate change, nullifying any benefits from planting trees.

Alistair deserves special recognition for his investigations of the historical ecology of local woodlands near his home, carried out in response to house and road building proposals. In particular, his 2018 study of the woods and wetlands at Bertha Park, Redgorton, 176 pages long, is better informed and more interesting than the brief and superficial report produced by the consultants paid by the developers. Around the same time, he also produced a shorter study of one of the woodlands on the outskirts of Scone. Reports of his studies of two woodlands near Methven and Den of Methven were the last of numerous articles he wrote for the PSNS Bulletins, which are all available to download from the PSNS Publications page www.psns.org.uk/psns-history.

Alistair's botanical knowledge was exceptional. He was never off-duty in the sense that he invariably found all aspects of nature of endless interest. His work and his play were the same thing. His daughter Margaret remembers that every weekend as a child she was taken up a hill, or along a riverbank, on the pretext of getting fresh air, really so that he could look at plants. Material possessions were not important to him, but over the years he built up a magnificent library of natural history books and classical music CDs. He had a TV licence, but never had a TV, watching films on his laptop from his vast collection of old films on DVD. He left his extensive collection of natural history books to the PSNS Library.

Alistair was joint BSBI Vice-county Recorder for Mid Perthshire (v.c. 88) from 2003, with Jim McIntosh, and during this time he also served on the BSBI Committee for Scotland. To maximise coverage, as v.c. 88 is the fourth largest vice-county in Scotland, Alistair and Jim usually recorded separately, Jim in the west and north of the county and Alistair in the south and east, although they did go out together on many BSBI and PSNS outings. One memorable recording week, spent with Tim Rich and Dan Watson in July 2018, was based in a cottage at the very west end of Glen Lyon, recording for Atlas 2020 in some of the most remote areas in the north of the county. They collected records from 21 tetrads in 5 hectads and made 34 new hectad records, all above 1000 feet, over rough terrain, exploring summit ridges and high corries. Jim recalls that Alistair was always generous with his time and expertise and became very good at getting to grips with tricky groups such as roses and eyebrights.

Neale Taylor, who has succeeded Alistair as joint recorder for v.c. 88 with Jim, is cataloguing Alistair's herbarium. He says that Alistair developed an interest in a number of more difficult plant groups during his vice-recordership and had productive relationships with several specialists in critical species. Perhaps the most notable was that with the *Euphrasia* expert Chris Metherell, with whom he spent a recording week on Shetland in 2016 looking at some of its more noteworthy *Euphrasia* species. He built up his own herbarium for the vice-county of around 700 specimens, including an extensive *Taraxacum* collection which he had not yet completed, as well as species and hybrids of roses, willows and of course eyebrights. With his meticulous nature it is no surprise that his interests led to an extensive but as yet uncatalogued moss collection. Once the collections have been fully curated it is hoped they can reside in a suitable institution such as the herbarium in Perth Museum.

Alistair is best remembered in Perthshire for his close connection with PSNS. He was chair of the Botanical Section of PSNS from 2000. Accounts of all the excursions led by him can be found in PSNS Botanical Bulletins, and are available on the PSNS Publications page. These are a tribute to his expertise, dedication, love of nature and writing ability.

My grateful thanks to all his family and friends who have helped me write this account of his life and achievements. He is much missed. His industry has left a magnificent legacy to Perthshire botany and hopefully, one day, his records will form part of a second Flora of Perthshire.

Liz Lavery