

Catriona W. Murray (1926–2014)

Catriona Murray, BSBI recorder for vice-county 104 (North Ebuades) from 1966 to 2006 and Honorary Member of the BSBI (2008) died on 27th April 2014 in Portree on her beloved Isle of Skye. Her death is a loss to the remarkable succession of largely self-taught female botanical recorders who, in the 1960s–1990s, contributed so much to our knowledge of the Scottish flora.

Catriona was born Dorothea Catherine Wallace Brown on 20th April 1926 and was brought up by her Scottish and Ulster Presbyterian parents in Edinburgh and then in Aberdeen. Despite her ambition to go to Art College in Edinburgh, she studied mathematics and natural sciences at Aberdeen University. There she met Robin Murray, ten years her senior, who was studying geography. Their friendship developed and they married in the summer of 1951. Although her family called her Dorothea, Robin disliked this name and called her Catriona, the Gaelic version of Catherine. She was known to all as Catriona throughout her life on Skye and in botanical circles.

After graduating in 1948, Catriona taught general science for two years on North Uist, where she was able to pursue her interest in water-colour painting and developed her life-long interest in the Gaelic language and in Gaelic culture and history. After their marriage, Robin and Catriona worked at the newly established Glenmore Lodge Outdoor Training Centre, where they lived in a small green caravan for a few years. It was perhaps these Cairngorm days that sparked Catriona's enduring love of the outdoors, of wild places, and of the sense of peace and solitude that comes from exploring challenging mountain landscapes like the Black Cuillin on Skye.

Soon after the birth of their eldest child, Neil (who tragically died in 2004), Robin was appointed science teacher at Portree High School and the Murrays settled in a croft at Prabost, to the west of The Storr in Trotternish. With the addition of Patrick and Catri-

ona Jr. to the family, Catriona and Robin remained at Prabost for the rest of their married life. Robin died in 1991 and Catriona moved in 2011 to Budhmor House in Portree. Robin had worked in the Meteorological Office during the Second World War and he quickly established a much-needed weather station at Prabost in 1959, which ran for over 40 years, thanks to Catriona's and Robin's meticulous recording of daily weather readings in the morning, midday, and evening. Prabost was a hive of activity over the years, with a few Cheviot Cross sheep; 'Unsurpassable' daffodil, soft fruit, and potato cultivation; peat cutting; hay-making; croft maintenance; gardening; and producing Skye perfume!

Besides her family and the croft, Catriona's major interest at Prabost was botany and plant recording. Her interest in flowers was initiated by her mother, but greatly kindled by Winsome ('Win') Muirhead at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and subsequently encouraged by several other botanists, including Ursula Duncan, Bill Burt, J. Grant Roger, Alf Slack, Douglas McKean, Joan Clarke, and Chris Page. In the 1960s she taught herself grasses, sedges, rushes, ferns, and fern allies and had a particularly keen eye for hybrid *Equisetum* (horsetails) and 'small' plants such as *Elatine hexandra* (Six-stamened Waterwort), *Isolepis setacea* (Bristle Clubrush), *Centunculus minimus* (Chaffweed), *Anagallis tenella* (Bog Pimpernel), *Subularia aquatica* (Awlwort), *Neottia cordata* (Lesser Twayblade) and *Hammarbya paludosa* (Bog Orchid). Catriona was appointed BSBI Recorder for v.c.104 in 1966, a position she held for 40 years. She meticulously recorded plants on Skye and later on Eigg, Muck, Rum, and Canna, as well as Soay, Scalpay, and Raasay. In 1974 she published the first edition of *The Botanist in Skye* (published by Portree High School). The second edition was published in 1980 by the BSBI and the third edition was privately published in 2005. She made many important botanical records and she was particularly proud of re-finding

Arctostaphylos alpinus (Arctic Bearberry) and *Kalmia procumbens* (Trailing Azalea) on Skye, and of discovering *Carex rupestris* (Rock Sedge) and *Lycopodiella inundata* (Marsh Clubmoss) on Skye and *Lycopodium annotinum* (Interrupted Clubmoss) on Scalpay. She was devoted to the BSBI and regularly travelled to the annual Exhibition Meeting. She must have had one of the longest and most arduous journeys of any recorder at these meetings, as she would never use the bridge between Skye and the mainland.

John and Hilary Birks started to visit Skye in 1966 and became close friends of Catriona and Robin. They regularly visited Prabost and camped there and contributed to Catriona's v.c.104 records from 1966 to about 1985. As her botanical coverage within v.c.104 extended to the Small Isles, John and Hilary and their son Christopher accompanied Catriona and Robin on botanical surveys of Canna, Sanday, and Rum, as well as Trodday and Soay in 1987. John joined Catriona and Robin on a memorable trip to the Julian Alps in Slovenia in 1983. Travelling with the Murrays was always an adventure. On one occasion on a local bus on the way to the foot of the Triglav, the locals were fascinated by Robin's kilt, Catriona's tartan scarf, and John's camera tripod legs sticking out of his rucksack. The locals were convinced that the three were a Scottish bagpipe trio and wanted this trio to play for them! In 1986, Catriona and Robin visited John and Hilary in Norway and visited many classical botanical and scenic areas, such as the Hardangervidda, Finse, Jostedal, Jotunheimen, Dovre, Knutshø, and Trolltinden. The great highlight was climbing Norway's highest mountain, Galdhøpiggen (2469m) on 26th July 1986, Robin's 70th birthday.

With Jim Bevan, Paddy Braithwaite, and sometimes Michael Braithwaite, Catriona undertook a lot of further recording, mainly on the Small Isles from 1992 to 1999. Stephen Bungard first visited Raasay in 1983 and contacted Catriona in 1988 about several new records from the island. From this developed a relationship that lasted 26 years, with many expeditions on Skye and Raasay and culminat-

ing in the vice-county recorder role being shared for several years and then transferred to Stephen in 2006.

Besides plants, Catriona had strong interests in Gaelic culture, country dancing, classical music (but not Mozart's immortal miniature masterpiece *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, which was Robin's favourite to play on a Friday evening after a week's teaching!), and literature, especially French literature, which she read in its original language. She was Secretary of the Skye Arts Guild in the 1980s and organised meetings, chamber concerts, and soirées. She became a keen supporter of the Skye & Lochalsh Orchestra, run by Stephen's wife Rosemary, though Catriona drew the line at music by Takemitsu. She held strong views, especially on Scottish independence and politics, and was eager to discuss a wide range of topics, because she had many ideas, opinions, interests, and experiences. Discussions on topics such as English 'incomers' to Skye, the European Union, or North Sea oil revenues could be challenging for the discussant!

Catriona was a devoted field botanist who was dedicated to recording her vice-county. She was always keen to set off into the hills in search of new records, to check on records made by others, and to help younger plant enthusiasts become acquainted with the wonderfully diverse and challenging flora of the Isle of Skye. Although initially rather shy and reserved, she could become a very good and loyal friend. She was an immensely kind and cheerful person who lived life to its fullest, whether making Skye perfume, growing 'Unsurpassable' daffodils, keeping up correspondence, maintaining her meticulous botanical notes, finding a new locality for *Pyrola media* (Intermediate Wintergreen) near Prabost, or searching for new colonies of *Arabis alpina* (Alpine Rock-cress) in the Black Cuillin.

We are indebted to Patrick Murray and Douglas McKean for providing some details of Catriona's life.

JOHN BIRKS, HILARY BIRKS & STEPHEN
BUNGARD.



Catriona Murray taking a break from *Arabis alpina* hunting in the Black Cuillin, Isle of Skye, June 1993. Photo © Lynne Farrell



Catriona Murray (right) with Christopher (left) and Hilary Birks (centre), Ord, Skye, August 1979. Photo © John Birks



Catriona Murray, one of the 'Bagpipe Trio' photographing *Saxifraga paniculata* in the Julian Alps, June 1983. Photo © John Birks