

JACK WILLIAM DONOVAN MBE

(1928 – 2012)

Jack Donovan, who died on 29th September 2012, was a leading Pembrokeshire naturalist for over half a century. Although best known for his formidable ornithological talents, he was active with plant recording from the time he was posted to the county with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) in 1958. One of his first notable Pembrokeshire finds was *Asplenium obovatum* (Lanceolate Spleenwort) on a rock face at North Haven, Skomer Island on 3rd August 1958 and this population still flourishes in exactly the same location. By 1959 he was the local correspondent submitting the Pembrokeshire plant records to the journal *Nature in Wales*. He joined the BSBI in 1962 and was, at one time, a member of the society's Welsh Regional Committee, as it was then titled.

Jack enthusiastically helped the late Tommie Warren Davis, the first resident BSBI recorder for the county, with his plant hunting in Pembrokeshire. They visited many botanical sites together between 1965 and 1980. He helped Tommie with his *Plants of Pembrokeshire*, published in 1970, commenting on and checking the text, and supplying some of the photographs, including the cover design of a Foxglove.

As a field engineer with MAFF, he was inevitably involved with many drainage schemes that reduced the extent of Pembrokeshire's wetlands. He was, however, also responsible for designing and creating many ponds and lakes. Most of the large numbers of early potato reservoirs of the Dale, Marloes and St David's peninsulas stand as testimonials to ensure that these open water bodies were also of maximum benefit to wildlife. There was no better person than Jack to bring together the all too often conflicting interests of wildlife conservation and farming. He founded the county Farming Forestry Wildlife Advisory Group in 1981. His tireless efforts in this field were recognised in 1985 with the prestigious Idris Davies Memorial Award for

services to agriculture in Pembrokeshire and in 1988, on his retirement, by an MBE for services to agriculture and wildlife. He became the Bird Recorder for Pembrokeshire in 1961 and continued for 40 years. He shared the role with Graham Rees from 1981 and in 1994 they published a county avifauna *Birds of Pembrokeshire*.

His retirement was almost entirely devoted to nature conservation. Just one example concerns the internationally important seabird islands of Skokholm and Skomer, where he continued to chair the Wildlife Trust's management committee. Any one lucky enough to have served under him on this management committee will long treasure memories of the jolly, yet skilful way that he handled the many complex and fascinating agenda items. In all this he was devotedly supported by his wife Jean and they even managed, on occasions, to escape his adopted and much loved Pembrokeshire to enjoy sunshine and wildlife sites in southern Europe. His holiday notebooks carefully record in splendid details the birds, insects and plants that they encountered each day. Back in Pembrokeshire he and Jean spent many happy days studying the re-colonisation of the former Esso refinery site at Milford Haven. He was given special access to this 'brown-field' site and all his detailed observations are meticulously described in his magnificent natural history diaries. Jack and Jean's house at The Burren, Crundale, Haverfordwest was a treasure trove of natural history books and paintings. Over the years the usable space in the living room became more and more confined to its centre, which was itself occupied by Jack's ever increasing portly figure!

Jack was a keen fly fisherman, so tales of the riverbank, including details of the weights of each catch, are also logged in the diaries. He also served on the Environment Agency area committee and was a long standing member of

the RSPB Wales Committee and served on the RSPB Council. Another field where his talents were in demand were on the army's Castlemartin Ranges' conservation group, where he was a member until 2004. His vast knowledge of wildlife and land management was tapped into by the military as they prepared and implemented their Integrated Land Management Plans for Pembrokeshire.

During his many years as one of the outstanding Pembrokeshire all-round naturalists, Jack, more than any other individual, became identified with the work of the Wildlife Trust. Indeed, for several years he was the Chairman of the West Wales Wildlife Trust. Jack led countless Wildlife Trust

excursions and plants would always feature when sites were explored. He was such a popular figure that his walks were always exceptionally well attended. Through these walks, through his evening talks, through his role chairing and serving on management committees and through his work with the farming community, this truly splendid person inspired many to look afresh at the plants of Pembrokeshire and to consider what management they needed to survive through challenging times.

STEPHEN EVANS