

OBITUARY

Tony Whilde

The death, in early February, of Tony Whilde has robbed Ireland of a widely respected ornithologist and a visionary conservationist and teacher - a loss Ireland can ill-afford. Tony had been fighting an inoperable brain tumour since last summer - sadly, a struggle that was ultimately unsuccessful.

Tony was a long-standing member of the Wader Study Group, but as well as his great interest in waterfowl he had other broad-ranging ornithological enthusiasms - especially for seabirds and the Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*. In the mid 1980s, with his wife Marriane, he set up the Corrib Conservation Centre on the shores of Lough Corrib in Co. Galway. The Whilde's purpose-built home, hostel and educational field laboratory has been highly successful. Tony co-ordinated and ran an ever increasing number of popular environmental courses from the Centre, as well as undertaking ecological consultancies. His courses covered a broad sweep of 'natural history' from the prehistory of Connemara, to the freshwater ecology of Lough Corrib, as well as on varied other cultural, botanical and ornithological themes.

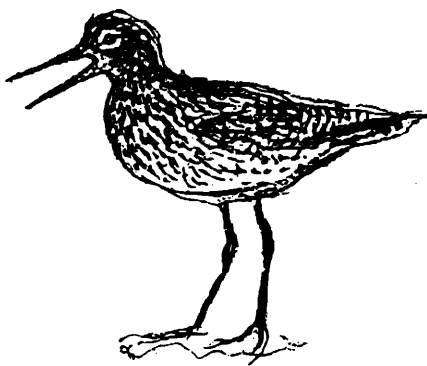
Tony had a particular interest in traditional farming and worked closely with the European Pastoralism Forum since its inception in 1988 at an international workshop on the conservation of Chough. He saw clearly that the future for many widely ranging species depends crucially on reform of the agricultural policies that have been so damaging to the natural environment across Europe, especially in Ireland. He was an enthusiastic advocate for the support of traditional low-intensity farming methods in Ireland - a theme that he would frequently stress not only in regular media activities in western Ireland, but also in his other teaching.

He was a prolific author. As well as a prolific flow of ornithological papers for a range of Irish journals, he produced a plethora of booklets and other material to accompany CCC

courses. In 1990 his *Birds of Galway: a review of recent records and field studies* was published by the Irish Wildbird Conservancy. Most recently, the Irish Vertebrate Red Data Book (*Threatened mammals, birds, amphibians and fish in Ireland*. HMSO, Belfast. 1993), summarised results from an international project to evaluate the current status of vertebrates on the island of Ireland, whilst last year he published an acclaimed and comprehensive volume on *The Natural History of Connemara* (Immel, 336 pp.).

I had the privilege of working closely with Tony on a review of potential EC Special Protection Areas in Ireland. Despite his expressed irritation at the complete inability of the Irish state to get adequately to grips with effective site-based conservation, he remained always cheerful, enthusiastic about his current work and optimistic about the future. He once noted to me that the Irish SPA review was about the fifth major inventory of important biological sites in Ireland that he had completed, yet adequate governmental conservation action on the ground seemed as far away as ever.

David A. Stroud



REVIEWS

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Meltofte, H. 1993. *Wader migration through Denmark: populations, non-breeding phenology and migratory strategies*. Dansk Ornithologisk Forenings Tidsskrift 87 (1-2): 1-180. In Danish, with comprehensive English summary.

The fundamental idea behind the birth of this study was a simple bringing together of data from different sources: from frequent counts of staging birds in different sites in Denmark, counts of birds on active migration and recoveries of ringed birds. While working out this idea, the task Meltofte set himself gradually went out of control and developed into a major study of migratory patterns of west Palearctic waders. By summarising the results and splitting up the results between coastal and inland wintering waders it finally lead to something rather unexpected: a further development of the ideas on population dynamics in waders as were presented by Alerstam and Høgstædt in 1982.

The basic information for the study are a few enormous data sets. It took the author three years to work through this pile and to summarise the information. Altogether nine sources were used: data from 48 ground and aerial counts from the Danish part of the Wadden Sea, mid-monthly counts during five years from some 200 wader staging areas throughout Denmark, 1,078 counts from the Tipperne area in west Jutland, 654 counts from another site in east Zealand, 10,000 hours of registrations of migrating birds passing Blåvandshuk in west Jutland and 11,500 hours of registrations at Amager near Copenhagen, information from juvenile/adult ratios from different sites, together with all recoveries of waders ringed or recovered in Denmark and casual observations from various sources.

As far as I know this is the first time ever that such a heterogeneous bunch