

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.

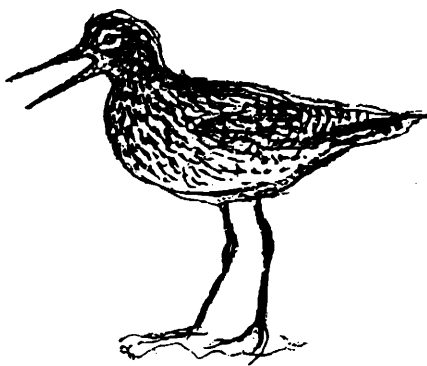
Tony had a particular interest in traditional farming and worked closely with the European Pastoralism Forum since its inception in 1988 at an international workshop on the conservation of Chough. He saw clearly that the future for many widely ranging species depends crucially on reform of the agricultural 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

of information has been brought together and evaluated. This alone is a most interesting exercise, very much deserving a follow up in other countries! Even more interesting is the evaluation of the material. The results are presented in 50 diagrams and maps, showing phenological patterns, distribution and, amazingly, also the adult/juvenile proportion in the population present in Denmark during the year. Additionally there are 16 tables listing countries and months in which ringed birds were recovered or ringed. The 35 species descriptions each take 2-12 pages and cover most of the Danish text. The information deals with coastal as well as inland species and many aspects of migratory behaviour. Though the study focuses on Denmark, the results are applicable to a much larger area, for most species probably as large as northwest Europe. The discussion covers 17 pages, the English summary another 12.

For many *Wader Study Group Bulletin* readers both the discussion and the English summary (pages 159-170) will be the most interesting part of the study. Meltofte tries to understand migratory movements from the needs of the birds. He argues, for instance, that loop migration may be triggered by the differences birds experience when crossing the Russian plains in spring and autumn. In autumn the plains and shallow water bodies in this region are dry and unfavourable as feeding areas for migratory waders. As an alternative these birds choose for a route through coastal western Europe. In spring the plains are wet due to snow melt and rains. The region then provides good feeding possibilities for several species of migrating waders, thus enabling a return to the breeding areas via this route.

By splitting up migratory waders into four categories (wintering in tidal and non-tidal habitats and temperate and tropical areas) and by analyzing the migration strategies of these groups Meltofte finds evidence for the assumption that birds wintering in tropical Africa effectively choose to do so. Such a strategy should not be considered a less preferred option compared to wintering in western Europe. This is an interesting

evaluation of the Alerstam and Høgstvedt model with consequences also for theories about differences in population dynamics of waders wintering in Europe and Africa. Good enough to use the study as a DSc. thesis in Copenhagen University, an event which took place in May 1994.

There remains the question of what the English reader misses when not having full access to the Danish text. Fortunately all figures and tables have English legends. Inevitably in the English species descriptions a lot of details are lost, for instance on timing of migration, locations of recovered ringed birds or the maximum numbers of birds in different sites. On the whole, however, the English summaries provide sufficient information to get the message.

Cor J. Smit

