

Geoff Orton 1946-2020



It is sad to have to report the death of Geoff Orton, who passed away on 26th December 2020 after a long illness with cancer. Geoff's funeral will be on 4th February at 12.00pm at the Garden of England Crematorium, Sittingbourne ME9 8GZ. Whilst attendance is limited by Covid restrictions, there is an online Memorial Page at <https://geoffreyorton.muchloved.com> where you can view photos and thoughts left by others, please feel free to add your own. Hopefully, there will be time between the receipt of this Newsletter and the funeral date for this to be possible. Donations can also be made to Prostate Cancer UK, the BTO, Kent Wildlife Trust and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust.

Many members may not know Geoff, but hopefully those who are members of the BTO will recall that he was the Kent Regional Representative (RR) from 2010-2019 who sent out BBS and WBBS forms each year to those participating in the schemes. Geoff was also the WeBS Regional Organiser for Kent during this time and as RR also organised BTO surveys for Kent, including House Martins, Non-Estuarine Waterbirds, Winter Thrushes and Woodcock. A member of the BTO since 1984, Geoff also carried out his own surveys including two BBS squares and WeBS counts on the South Medway from Lower Halstow, the village where he lived.

Geoff worked for Lloyds of London and Prudential, and later volunteered for the Citizens Advice Bureau, which led to working as a Student Adviser at Canterbury University. Following retirement, Geoff was able to devote more time to his birding interests and travel. As well as his commitments to the BTO, KOS and KWT, Geoff was also a member of the African Bird Club and regularly attended AGMs. This was noted by the Chairman at the time, Keith Betton, who asked Geoff to join the Council and immediately take on the role of Secretary! This Geoff did without qualms for two years and followed up by becoming the Membership Secretary for a further year. In Keith's words: -

For me, as Chairman at those times of need, Geoff was like a quietly spoken and very calm SAS commando. Twice I asked him to parachute into unfamiliar territory, and twice he made a perfect landing and did exactly what was needed. Every organisation needs someone like Geoff. A person who rarely says "no", and never gets into a flap.

Geoff also volunteered for the RSPB on Sheppey and was a much-valued member of warden Nick May's task force. His all-round knowledge of both fauna and flora was imparted in his usual modest manner. Geoff also took an off-road driving course and became the volunteer's driver around the reserve – but managed to drive the truck into a ditch, which is now known affectionately as "Geoff's ditch"! In recent years Geoff was also a regular crew member on the RSPB-hired rib, which conducts WeBS counts each month on the Medway Estuary, often in poor weather conditions, until ill health prevented his continued participation.

Away from Kent, Geoff enjoyed foreign travel and explored many parts of the world, often on cruises with his wife Jan to whom he was married for 50 years. Tanzania was a favourite destination, and one holiday involved a successful trip to Ghana in 2013 with the African Bird Club. It was not long after this, however, that Jan became ill and, a few years later, she tragically died suddenly at home in September 2017. Geoff himself was already undergoing treatment for cancer and sadly had increasing problems with his memory, which affected his ability to carry out his BTO

duties. Although he retired as Kent RR in 2019, Geoff had continued to help as best he could before standing down and he helped set up the first meeting for North Kent WeBS counters. It was from this and subsequent meetings that others became more involved and enabled WeBS to be further developed across the Thames, Medway and Swale.

Geoff was a quiet and unassuming man who went about his business with minimal fuss, never wanting to trouble others. The BTO, KOS and KWT, amongst others, owe a debt of gratitude for his services and will want to pass on their best wishes and condolences to his family. Geoff leaves daughter Emily and her husband Jonathan, son Richard and his wife Laura plus granddaughter Melissa.

Murray Orchard