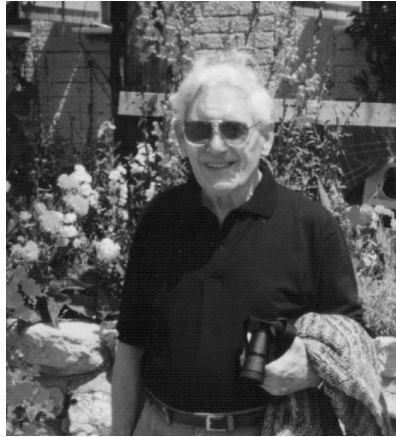


Geoffrey Munns 1920-2011

BTO Regional Rep for Kent for more than three decades

Jim Flegg



Geoffrey Munns, who died in December 2011, was born in July 1920 to Army parents in India, where it seems he enjoyed a free-range childhood becoming familiar with many aspects of local natural history. Returning to school in England, he performed well academically and became an accomplished sportsman. With World War II looming, he joined the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich to become a gunnery officer, travelling to France with the British Expeditionary Force at the outbreak of war. Having fought a rear-guard action, his was one of the last artillery batteries to spike its guns and evacuate the beaches of Dunkirk. He then saw service with the Chindits in Burma, and post-war in Malaya and in the infamous Suez campaign. Leaving active service, he moved to a variety of administrative posts, including the Army Records Office – which may account for his meticulous approach later as the BTO Regional Representative (RR) for Kent.

Joining the Kent Ornithological Society in 1960 and the BTO in 1962, Geoffrey became RR for Kent in 1967, providing that vital link between the KOS and BTO surveys and of immense value to both organisations. He remained RR until his retirement in 2000, making him one of the elite band of ultra-long-serving RRs. On the BTO side, he was elected to BTO Council in 1975, and became Hon. Sec. from 1979-82. In 1985 he was awarded the BTO's highest distinction, the Tucker Medal. In Kent, but outside the general run of KOS affairs, he was a member of the Cinque Ports Training Area Conservation Group maintained by the Army to inform and guide its conservation work, where what impressed was his field competence, not only in ornithology, but also the respect shown to him by all Army staff. Geoffrey was a man for the orderly collation of facts, figures and distributions rather than the plumage subtleties of rarities, though it is said that as a youngster in India he was shown a Pink-headed Duck, maybe one of the last Europeans to see this duck which reputedly became extinct in the wild in about 1935. Especially with the BTO Atlas and Breeding Bird Survey projects, his impeccably organised Kentish network of 10km square Stewards was the envy of his RR colleagues, one of whom remarked that he cherished a mental image of the Stewards as pawns neatly arranged on a chess board. That same long-serving RR also commented that ornithology will sadly but inevitably "see the endings of many old troopers in the next few years. And look what we have spawned can't be bad".

To all, Geoffrey was a gentleman, kindly, courteous and helpful, always enthusiastic about census or survey work and ever grateful in an unpatronising way even for minor contributions. In short, he was a much-respected stalwart supporter through and through of both the KOS and the BTO. To his wife Sheila and his family we extend our deepest sympathy.

