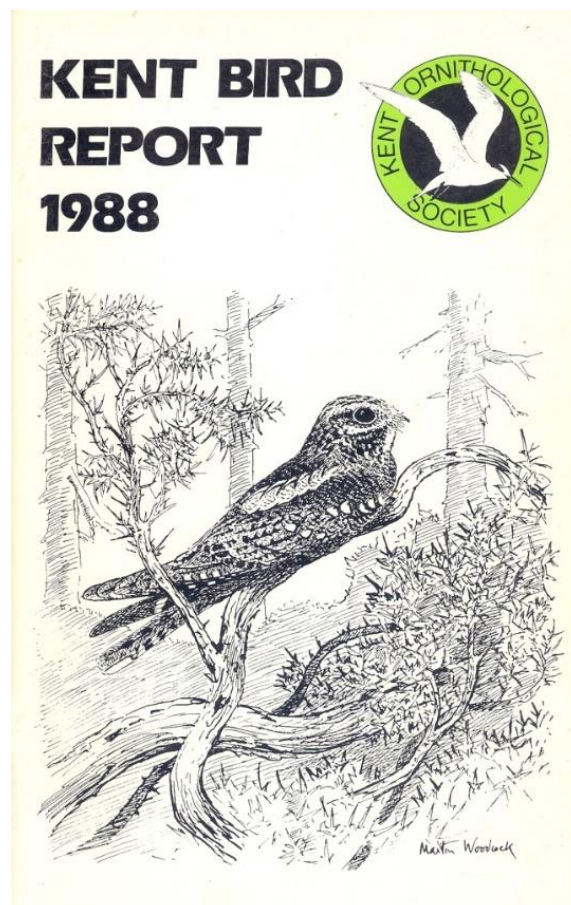


Obituary: Martin Woodcock 1935-2019



Blue-shouldered Robin Chat

Martin Woodcock, bird artist, author & illustrator, who died on 24th February, was arguably the KOS member best known on the international ornithological scene. His artwork was extensive, from the Field Guide to the Birds of South-East Asia of 1975 through the Handguide of to the Birds of the Indian Sub-continent (for which he also wrote the text) and the Birds of Oman to the popular little Collins Gem guide to Birds. His major work, for which he will be most remembered, however, is the majestic seven volumes of the Birds of Africa, published between 1982 and 2004. This involved long hours studying skins at the Natural history Museum at Tring and field trips to many countries of that continent, resulting in about 6000 images of over 2000 species. Some of these journeys, starting with a formative visit to his elder sister in Uganda in 1961, are described in the delightful Safari Sketchbook of 2010, appropriately dedicated to his wife Barbara who “made things work and made it fun”.



Amongst all this he found time to contribute drawings for the covers of the KBRs of 1987-91. Success in this field was all the more amazing because Martin, whose father had died whilst Martin was an infant, was a self-taught artist from his schooldays, mentored by his prep school doctor and influenced by the work of George Lodge and Archibald Thorburn. Christ's Hospital

School in Sussex, a charitable institution, provided great support for the budding artist. After National Service he became a stockbroker, surviving nearly 20 boring years in the city, during which he was Hon. Sec. of the British Ornithologists Club. It was a brave move to leave the city for a very uncertain life as a bird artist, when Collins

commissioned him to illustrate the Birds of SE Asia, on which he had been working in his spare time. Then, to be selected to be the sole illustrator by the authors of the Birds of Africa was an immense challenge, occupying him fully over the next 25 years as the project grew with the expanding knowledge of African birds. During this time he was also much involved in the founding of the African Bird Club, becoming its first Chairman and later President, as it became such a valued source of information and supporter of conservation research on that continent.

In 2000, Martin and Barbara, tired of congested Kent, migrated to the supposed relative peace of north Norfolk, where their new home at Wiveton soon became a most hospitable centre for the local scene, with so many birding opportunities on their doorstep. Martin continued with commissions whilst Barbara ran a complementary framing business.

Sadly, last September Martin was diagnosed with incurable bowel cancer, and pragmatically set about planning the disposal of his extensive library. His series of KBRs returned to Kent for the use of future generations whilst his archive of sketches and notes has been deposited at NHM Tring, where he had spent so many days studying the reference skins.



Dusky Flycatcher

Martin had planned his funeral in Wiveton church. His family, including 14 grandchildren who meant so much to him were much involved in the celebration of his life; a poet, an acute observer of the natural world and a significant contributor to world ornithology.

Chris Cox