

## Anthony John (Tony) Holcombe



It is with some sadness that I report the passing of Tony Holcombe at the end of September at the age of eighty-three, after a period of illness. He was such a feature of birding in the South East, but particularly as a regular visitor to Dungeness and Rye harbour. Tony was a true gentleman, clever but modest, an accomplished linguist, he loved music and playing keyboard instruments, including the organ and, of course, was well known for his love of all wildlife. Tony was best known to most as a keen and knowledgeable birder, in fact a world birder and traveller. Of the 10,000 species in the world today, Tony has set eyes on over 5,000 of them. But he was also a naturalist. He loved plants, moths, butterflies, insects indeed everything under the sun. His botanical knowledge was exceptional and he kept lists of absolutely anything and everything he had ever seen, including the dates he first saw them.

I had known him since 1965, when I had the great good fortune to have him as my first Biology teacher at Purley Grammar school. He took my enthusiasm for nature and channelled it through the Natural History Society he ran and expanded my horizons from mostly birds to all of nature. Through trips organised by him I made my first ever visits to Stodmarsh, Cliffe, Northward hill and Sheppey. He was the most accessible and humorous of teachers and when I became a biology teacher thirty-three years later, I kept the memory of his teaching style as my model. Over the years we met up from time to time, but rarely often enough, sometimes in the field at Dunge, occasionally at one of the epic lectures he gave, illustrated with Brenda's excellent photographs. I recall her telling me how he was known as 'Hawkeye' among friends, but that she had re-christened him "The Spectacled Tyrant" after a particular avian denizen of South America. He bore that with typical humour.

I was astonished to find details of his earlier life which I had never known. A scholarship to Cambridge to study languages (hardly surprising for such a consummate linguist), followed by National Service in the Royal Navy, where as a Russian interpreter, he achieved the rank of Lieutenant Commander! He was later awarded a decoration for his services to the RNR. After a range of teaching posts in the South-east of England and Scotland he became a feature of Tonbridge School, when his skills as a promoter of Natural History were exploited to the full,

producing a series of students who went on to work in conservation globally. Subsequently, he was able to mix his teaching career and his love of natural history when Lawrence Holloway set up one of the very first tour companies for naturalists called Ornitholidays. From then on, Tony taught part-time at Tonbridge School when not leading tours abroad.

Tony and Brenda were regular contributors of records to the KOS (and other societies) for many years. We extend our condolences to Brenda, but I was delighted to hear from her that she had made the trip to see the Margate White-billed Diver in the days following his funeral, and she was pleased to have watched it through Tony's binoculars. I am sure that somewhere Tony was pleased, too!

Norman McCanch