



Brian Roy Pitkin (12 November 1945 – 31 August 2021)

Caroline Bateman



Brian, 5th from right at the SBS meeting in Hornecourt Wood, Outwood, April 2011

Brian was born to parents Owen and Eve in 1945 in Upper Basildon, near Pangbourne in Berkshire. He was the third of four children and the only son. His father was a scientist and during WWII worked on Operation Pluto (Pipeline Underwater Transportation of Oil), a

project to pipe oil under the English Channel in support of the Allied Invasion of Normandy. Brian was just four years old when his father was tragically killed in a car crash. His mother and the four children then moved from Berkshire to Streatham where they lived with Brian's paternal grandmother and it was here that he spent the rest of his young days. He attended Archbishop Tenison School in Lambeth and also joined the Scouts where he achieved the Queen's Scout Award.

From his earliest years Brian had a great interest in natural history, and as a young boy had a particular fondness for butterflies. His early interest in the natural world led to a 41-year career at the Natural History Museum. He joined in 1964 as a scientific assistant in the Entomology Department working first on thrips (tiny sap-sucking flies also known as thunderflies), then springtails (organisms that contribute to the decomposition of organic matter) and later flies. He gained his PhD on Lesser Dung Flies from Imperial College in 1986 while still working at the Museum. During his career Brian had a number of insect species named after him, including the wonderfully named, *Bhattithrips pitkini*, a thrip found on an Australian rainforest shrub, *Claoxylon australe*. He published many very useful scientific research papers before becoming Systems and Data Manager in the last few years of his career. After retirement, he continued for some time as a Scientific Associate, working from home on a web-based project on leaf miners.

It was at the Museum that Brian met Linda Macdonell who had joined the Entomology Department in 1967. Before long they were engaged and in 1970 Linda Macdonell became Mrs Linda Pitkin. Their first home was in Thornton Heath where they lived for eleven years. They then moved to the house in South Croydon where they remained for the rest of their married life, and where Linda still lives. They celebrated their Golden Wedding quietly at Botley Hill Farmhouse in Warlingham during a period of relaxation of coronavirus restrictions in July 2020.

Working at the Museum gave Brian the opportunity to travel widely, including fieldwork and research visits to Trinidad, East Africa, the USA, Brazil, and Sulawesi in Indonesia to participate in Project Wallace. It was during the East Africa trip in 1974 that Brian first became interested in the undersea world when he found an opportunity to go snorkelling there. On returning home, he joined the Thornton Heath branch of The British Sub-Aqua Club and learned to dive. He soon became the Diving Officer and Linda was persuaded to learn too. Both of them went on to enjoy scuba diving not only in the chilly waters around the British coast but in warmer tropical seas in many far-flung and remote places around the world. Brian became a very accomplished underwater photographer and an invaluable member of the British Society of Underwater Photographers (BSoUP), serving as Newsletter Editor, Chairman, Webmaster and President, as well as setting up the Society's Facebook group. A tribute from a member of BSoUP sums up just how much Brian was appreciated: "The power behind BSoUP: long may he be remembered for his outstanding enthusiasm in promoting underwater photography. Brian's legacy to BSoUP will surely outlive all of us." According to another tribute, "He always had a kind word to say and was cheerful no matter what came his way!" All of us in the Surrey Botanical Society will recognise these accounts of Brian.

When health problems prevented him from continuing with diving and underwater photography, he had more time for another of his keen interests, recording and photographing

British wild flora. His interest in plants was not just as the hosts of entomological species but for the plants themselves. He and Linda joined the Surrey Botanical Society in 2008 after meeting Eileen Taylor at Howell Hill. From then on, they were regular attenders at both indoor and field meetings, and many of us will recall Brian arriving at the appointed meeting place with a cheerful greeting and holding a takeaway coffee. As well as participating in organised meetings and outings with other SBS members Brian, with Linda, spent much time searching for and photographing species of interest in local botanical hotspots like Happy Valley, Riddlesdown and Selsdon Wood and elsewhere in the county. One of their earliest records is for *Hypopitys monotropa* subsp. *hypophegea* (Yellow Bird's-nest) from Titsey Plantation, not recorded there by the SBS since Salmon's time. He also had a particular fondness for *Paris quadrifolia* (Herb-paris), among other plants, and monitored the colonies in Selsdon Wood and other sites in the east of the county.

Brian was invited to join the committee of the Surrey Botanical Society in 2014. His database skills made him the obvious successor to Robin Day who designed our website and who resigned as Webmaster in 2017. Brian had already kept Robin well supplied with regular and invaluable updates on the distribution of our county's flora based on analyses of SBS MapMate data. The biannual record and taxa spreadsheets per monad were vital tools in guiding the Society's recording efforts in preparation for the Rare Plant Register and a future Flora. As well as managing and updating parts of the website, inputting and analysing MapMate data, Brian also set up and oversaw our Facebook group which now has more than 200 members. We have much to thank him for.

Brian had suffered from a number of health problems in recent years but these hadn't prevented him from playing a full and active role in the Society both out in the field and behind the scenes. It was however the onset of Lewy Body dementia that dealt him such a devastating blow. It is a cruel condition that affects memory, cognitive function, balance and movement as well as mood. The progress of the disease and his decline were rapid but Linda managed to arrange care for him at home.



Brian, with members of the SBS at Farthing Down, July 2015

Tributes that Linda received from members of the Society refer with great affection to his good humour, good company, kindness, generous advice to those struggling with MapMate and encouragement to new members.

The Surrey Botanical Society has lost a valuable committee member and a good companion on field meetings. We shall miss him greatly and offer our most sincere condolences to Linda.

Howard Wallis – In Memoriam **Isobel Girvan, Alistair Kirk & Pete Howarth**

We have to report the sad news of the death, in October last year, of Howard Wallis who was for many years the Vice-county Recorder for the British Bryological Society (BBS) for VC17 Surrey and more recently a member of Surrey Botanical Society. Howard's interest in bryophytes and plants came later in life having previously been a successful businessman and noted international birder. Isobel and Sue Cooper had the pleasure of going out with him on several bryology trips including one to Britty Wood adjacent to Puttenham Common. He was always so kind and helpful when explaining identification points and would regularly confirm identifications by post with additional information and words of encouragement. He will be greatly missed by all of those who knew him.

SBS Newsletter No.41 – Copy Date **Editor**

Would all those intending to send contributions for inclusion into the next SBS Newsletter note that they should be sent by email to the Editor by the end of September 2022 to enable production and distribution to take place before the end of October. Please check that you have received a reply confirming receipt.

In order for the Society to keep in touch, and you fully informed, please ensure that you notify the Secretary if you should change your e-mail and/or postal address. Thank you.

Surrey Botanical Society Contacts:

Chairman: C. W. (Bill) Stanworth

Hon. Secretary: P. (Peter) Wakeham

Hon. Treasurer: C. (Caroline) Bateman

Newsletter Editor: G. (Graham) Cotten

Other Committee Members: G. (George) Hounsome; R. (Roger) Hawkins; I. (Isobel) Girvan;
S. (Susan) Medcalf

VC Recorder for BSBI: TBA

Web-site: www.surreyflora.org.uk