

John Meiklejohn (1926 - 2019)

HARRY GREEN



John Meiklejohn (centre) with members of the Study Group, finding *Formicoxenus nitidulus* (see p32) 16 Sept 2006

R: Winnall

Every naturalist in Worcestershire knew John Meiklejohn. He was the man who could identify anything: plant, moss, lichen, beetle, spider, fish, snail, snake, bird or mammal. And he was always willing to explain how to do so – count the spines on a beetle leg, look for hairs on a plant's sepal. He was a patient and clear teacher. Besides being a school teacher he taught adult classes on natural history subjects for Birmingham University Extra Mural department for many years. Several generations of Worcestershire naturalists were inspired to become natural historians by his enthusiasm, kindness and teaching ability. He gave many talks and conducted many walks about natural history. His old hand-operated slide projector was famous even when the modern electronic world started to take over.

His passion was to accurately name things in the natural world and to record them. When the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre started in the 1970s he immediately became a leading light. When the first efforts stumbled some years later through disappearance of funding he, and a small group of naturalists, kept it going until it was rescued by the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and re-started at their HQ at Lower Smite Farm. There the foundations were laid for a modern Biological Records Centre by the hard voluntary effort of John Meiklejohn and John Partridge. He even, reluctantly, learned how to use a computer, although he stuck to his beloved card index.

My first memories of him come from the 1960s when we were searching for rare Marsh Warblers in marshy places near his house. A little later he provided accommodation and support for several researchers into the birds life histories and ecology. One of them caught a large green beetle in mist nets set to catch birds for ringing and release. John identified it as the rare Noble Chafer, the first to be found in this part of Worcestershire much to the amazement of national experts. He recorded many county firsts.

Other memories.. I often took him insects to identify and in later years this often involved not just the beetles but trial of his latest home-made wine and many stories of his youth on a farm, his wartime travels round the world, and later round Europe with his family.

He helped with local wildlife conservation in many practical ways – erecting stalls at Tiddesley Wood Open Day, helping at log sales, tree planting and all the basic physical efforts needed to conserve habitat but often with side-tracks explaining what that beetle was when revealed under a log, naming that centipede in woodland leaf litter, and that unusual plant in grassland.

For Worcestershire's natural history John made a real difference, he taught many people, recorded many things, and was a great friend.

This article is an extract from the Wyre Forest Study Group annual Review 2019