



Ecology and nature conservation suffered a major loss with the death, on 17 October 1997, of Colin Tubbs. Most WSG members will probably know of Colin through his work on the waders of the Solent on the south coast of England. However, this was just one of his many areas of expertise, centred on – but not confined to – his beloved county of Hampshire.

Colin was one of the pioneers of scientifically based nature conservation. He came from a fine tradition in British natural history of an amateur, largely self-taught background but eventually became the ultimate in professional skills and knowledge – though never neglecting the voluntary roots. For much of his career, from 1960 to 1993, Colin was the Nature Conservancy's man in Hampshire. He was a stalwart of the era in which the Nature Conservancy and its successor were viewed widely as the world leader in nature conservation practice. This was based on a combination of national subject specialists and local specialists who knew their areas, the natural history and the people extremely well. The more recent approach is different.

Colin was one of the best examples of the Conservancy's local man. He was also so knowledgeable on a range of subjects that the national specialists were quite likely to seek his advice. This was certainly the case for myself, the ornithological specialist in the Nature Conservancy Council's later years. In fact, I could never think of an excuse for visiting Hampshire in that period! Regrettably, this meant that most of my contacts with Colin were limited to telephone conversations. This changed around Colin's retirement, and in his last few years we worked together closely on the development of the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism.

As many WSG members know well, the Forum promotes sustainable high biodiversity agriculture. Colin and his wife Jenni, who long worked together as an effective team, made a major contribution to the development of the Forum. This was both by providing key

administrative roles at a key stage of the Forum's development and in fundamental work on science and policy development. Colin's ability to express, simply and clearly, deep and complex issues was invaluable in steering the Forum's approach. Forward-looking to the end, Colin's paper on a vision for rural Europe was published shortly after his death (*British Wildlife* 9: 79-85; *La Cañada* 7: 5-7). In fact, we are fortunate that Colin wrote a great deal in his last few months, and Jenni (to whom we send our thoughts) will be seeing these through to safe publication.

It was typical of Colin's modest approach that, even though I spent a great deal of time discussing things with him in his later years, I was ignorant of the extent of his achievements. For this reason, I am indebted to Peter Marren, who is responsible for most of the following paragraphs, which try to give a fuller memoir of the most remarkable of these.

Mike Pienkowski

Colin Tubbs will always be linked with the New Forest, which he had known intimately since boyhood, and where he would camp for weeks on end studying bird life. In the 1960s, he became a forceful and outspoken opponent of the Forestry Commission, which at that time was set on draining wet places, clear-felling ancient woods in the name of regeneration and replacing native trees with conifers. It was largely due to Colin's persistence and depth of knowledge that the users of the Forest began to take nature conservation more seriously, culminating in a government review in 1970, which effectively saved the remaining ancient and semi-natural woods of the Forest. Colin was convinced that commercial silviculture was wholly unacceptable in the New Forest - it could never be made profitable anyway - and pressed for the introduction of a New Forest Authority which would provide it with the status of a National Park. Despite some 70% of respondents in favour of this proposal, the government turned it down in 1994 after opponents of the Park were able to play on the anxieties of the commoners. However, Colin was more successful in persuading the local authority to create a protective buffer zone around the Forest,

and ensuring that nature conservation is a primary aim within it. Hampshire became a crucible for nature conservation practice in the 1980s, with an increasing pressure for development on some of the country's richest wildlife sites. Colin Tubbs fought 160 public inquiries defending SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) against bypasses, housing developments, marinas and other recreation sites and agricultural destruction. He won most of them by choosing his ground carefully, and preparing his case better than his opponents. Some of the latter pressed his seniors to move him, but Colin stayed where he was, refusing promotion and once reputedly dropping the move order into the wastepaper basket. Towards the end of his 33 year stint in office, public opinion began to change, and Colin was able to build sympathetic nature conservation policies into local plans and persuade most owners of SSSIs to agree to management plans to maintain important habitats. Although it made his life uncomfortable at times, Colin's uncompromising line on SSSIs and his unusual degree of moral certainty have been vindicated by time. In some respects he was the forerunner of environmental campaigners today, although Colin pursued his case through statutory means and scientific research rather than through demonstrations and direct action.

He was the author of two classic accounts of the Forest: *The New Forest: An Ecological History* (1968) was 20 years ahead of its time in its synthesis of land-use history and ecology. *The New Forest* (1986) in the Collins New Naturalist library, is the standard account of the region. Colin completed a revision and update of the book shortly before he died. He also published books and scientific papers on The Solent, the birds of the Forest and the Hampshire coast, the management of heathlands and estuaries, and the history of commons. He was a wildlife purist who disdained the use of hides and technology and relied on the use of his eyes and his mind. Like many naturalists of his generation, he was strongly influenced by the writings of Aldo Leopold, and argued that wild places should be left wild, and not cluttered up with hides, car parks and other 'visitor facilities'. By the same token, he rather enjoyed



nature's wilder side, notably the floods and gales of the late 1980s and 1990s. Despite a long struggle against cancer, Colin Tubbs remained active until the end, producing a stream of thoughtful papers on the broad theme of man and wildlife, and represented the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism. The key to salvation, as he saw it, lay in the reform of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy.

Without it, much of Europe's wildlife and wild places will sooner or later be destroyed. Colin Tubbs was a thorn in the side of the establishment, and the honours which he deserved and many expected him to receive were not forthcoming. To many conservationists he was a hero - even, it is suggested, a saint, although if so it would be a St George, riding against the dragons of greed and thoughtless development.

However, he remained what he always was, a conscientious, quietly-spoken man with a deep reverence for nature, who enjoyed nothing more than a pint of real ale or a favourite bottle of wine in the right kind of company. He is survived by his wife, Jenni, whom he married in 1968, and who was also a professional colleague and lifelong companion in the field.

Non-estuarine Coastal waterfowl Survey (NEWS)

The counting phase for NEWS is now completed and we are looking forward to the next stage of analysing the data. At the time of writing, we are beginning to receive a steady flow of UK data, with Fair Isle (Shetland) returning their first batch of counts in early December! Overall, we are very pleased with the quality of the data received. It is interesting to note that several observers have commented on the scarcity of some wader species during recent years along their 'local coastline'.

Away from the UK, Gibraltar was the first country to inform us of the results of their survey. These were interesting, (if somewhat disappointing for the local ornithological society, whose counters had worked hard to provide thorough coverage), as only a single Whimbrel was recorded! This was apparently a 'staggeringly low count' for wintering waders on the island.

The weather was generally unseasonably mild for most of the NEWS period in the UK, but regular gales and heavy rain presented problems in many northern and western parts. Towards the end of the counting period (the second half of

January), temperatures returned to the seasonal norm. It is unlikely that the weather had much effect on the numbers and distribution of the coastal waterfowl. We would like to say a very big thank you to all those who took part in NEWS, whether as a local or national organiser or as a volunteer willing to count sections of coastline. Without all of your efforts, surveys such as NEWS could not happen. Finally, if there are any of you who still have count data, then please send them to your local/national organiser or to the BTO as soon as possible. Many thanks.

Steve Holloway (NEWS Project Officer)

The WSG Colour-marking Register.

We regularly get letters from people who have reported colour-ringed waders but have not received a reply from the ringer who marked the bird. When we get a report of a colour-ringed bird we reply giving the name of the ringer we believe to have ringed the bird and an indication of the area/country where the bird was marked. We also tell the person reporting the bird that the ringer will contact them with more details.

Unfortunately, it appears that some ringers do not respond. This is not only disappointing for the person who sent in the sighting, but also it does not give them an incentive to report the next colour-ringed bird they see. We therefore request that every ringer who is sent a sighting, either direct or via the register, responds giving as much detail as possible about the bird in question. We are aware that not every ringer is interested in sightings away from their

study site, but to ensure that people continue to send in sightings for those ringers who are interested, please reply. If the sighting is not of one of your birds please return it to the register.

Untraceable sightings

A number of the sightings we receive are untraceable, usually for one or more reasons. The commonest reasons are usually inaccurate recording of details by the person reporting the bird, difficulty in seeing all the rings, loss of rings and unregistered schemes. In order to overcome some of these problems, we give a few hints on reporting colour-ring sightings and on ringing itself. The following are commonly-made mistakes.

Advice on reporting sightings of colour-ringed birds

- If possible always report your colour-ring sighting using a standard form, which is available from the address below. If you are unable to use a standard form, a diagram of the bird's legs showing whether the rings are on

the tarsus or tibia is very useful.

- Always report the location of the metal ring, this is important for separating different schemes.
- If possible, try to note the size of the rings; some schemes use 'tall' and others 'short' rings. A number of schemes use flag-shaped rings.
- Always ensure when you report rings as being on the left or right leg that it is the bird's left or right leg. This may seem obvious, but this is a common mistake.
- Remember that there are two colours of 'blue' and 'green': light and dark.
- Always indicate if any parts of the legs are not visible, *i.e.* in mud or under water.
- If reporting via E-mail always give your postal address as well in case the ringer is not on E-mail.

Advice on colour ringing.

Compiled by Niall Burton, BTO

- Only colour-rings made from DARVIC should be used on waders. Other materials (celluloid and acetate)

