

## OBITUARIES

Edited by James Wiley

(To whom obituary manuscripts should be sent)

**Maurice Bateman Hutt, 1919–1998**—Maurice Bateman Hutt was born in Warwickshire, England and from a tender age his parents aroused in him an interest for natural history, particularly birds and plants, and actively encouraged his love and study of natural history throughout his childhood. He received his secondary education at Bablake School, Coventry, England and then read history at Downing College, University of Cambridge,

where he was awarded a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in 1940, and a Master of Arts in 1947. With the outbreak of World War II he, like so many of his generation, joined the British Army in which he served for over seven years, attaining the rank of Captain. He was stationed in Barbados from 1942 to 1944, during which time he met and married a local, Hazel Branch. Thus began what would be a long association with the island. He returned



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to Barbados with his wife in 1954 to take up the post of Head of the History Department at Harrison College, one of the island's prominent secondary schools, a position which he held until retirement in 1979.

On his return, Captain Hutt pursued his favorite pastime – birdwatching – and quickly immersed himself into discovering the island's birdlife. This passion would continue for over the next 40 years, during which time he gained unrivalled knowledge of the island's birds, migrant and local alike, and made an immense contribution to Barbadian, and by extension West Indian, ornithology. His unfettered access to the private shooting swamps until the mid-1960s allowed him to witness first hand the shorebird migration, during fall in particular. One of these private areas, the mangrove ecosystem at Graeme Hall, was particularly productive for birdwatching and, over the years, he observed many species, particularly Parulidae, which were new to the island at this location.

In September 1955, Hurricane Janet struck the island and brought in its aftermath an Alpine Swift (*Apus melba*) and a Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*). These would be the first of an impressive list of transatlantic species he would record over the years, which included Jack Snipe (*Lymnocyptes minimus*), Garganey (*Anas querquedula*), Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*), and Common Greenshank (*T. nebularia*). These Old World species were often the first record for the Caribbean region and occasionally the first for the Western Hemisphere. His observations over the years demonstrated that transatlantic vagrancy by Old World species occurred more frequently than was previously thought. His most significant observations and specimens obtained from the mid-1950s until the mid-1960s were communicated to James Bond, who published the details in his occasional supplements to the "Check-list of Birds of the West Indies" (1956).

There was a hiatus in his local birdwatching activities from the mid-1960s until the late 1970s, when his interest in birds and the general study of nature was renewed. He continued field observations until the end of the 1980s when an old knee injury curtailed his activities. By the early 1990s, the few trips into the field were invariably made with a family member, Edward Massiah, who had recently settled on the island. As with myself, Captain Hutt was instrumental in assisting and encouraging Edward's interest in ornithology and took him several times on field trips in England.

Although Captain Hutt visited many of the other Lesser Antillean islands over the years to birdwatch, his major travels in pursuit of his hobby were across the Atlantic. He and his wife traveled all over the British Isles and in most continental European countries. In addition, three extensive camping tours of Turkey were undertaken as was a 4-month journey by car from England to India and back. These trips provided him with first hand experience of many western Palearctic species, a few of which he would later encounter on Barbados. He was elected a member of the British Ornithologists' Union in 1953 and joined the American Ornithologists' Union in 1956.

Captain Hutt's contribution to the print media included numerous articles for local newspapers and magazines, and the publication of three books. This commenced in September 1955 when a hunter, knowing of his interest in birds, brought him a bird for identification. It proved to be a Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*), the first record for the island, and as a result he wrote a short note for the local newspaper on its occurrence. This would be the first of his "Bird Life in Barbados" articles, which appeared every two weeks until the early 1960s. He initiated a weekly column in a local newspaper in 1977 entitled "Barbadian Nature Diary",

which was a running commentary of his daily observations covering all aspects of the island's flora and fauna. In 1978, he started a second weekly column in the same local newspaper called "The Need for Conservation" which, as the title indicates, focused on conservation issues and historical topics. These weekly articles ceased in the mid-1980s, creating a void in public education articles which remains largely unfilled even to this day. The "Barbadian Nature Diary" articles formed the nucleus for two books — the first bearing the same name as the articles appeared in 1979 and was followed a few years later by "A Naturalist's Year in Barbados". The additional time provided by retirement in 1979 was initially used in writing his third book, "Exploring Historic Barbados", which was published in 1981. At the instigation of Allan Keith, Captain Hutt and his wife prepared, in the early 1990s, a manuscript on the birds of Barbados which primarily detailed their records over the almost 40 years on Barbados and which was to be published as part of the British Ornithologists' Union Check-list series. This work was entrusted to other authors to complete but, regrettably, the Huttts did not live to see the work published. This would have been the crowning achievement of their lives and would have provided the recognition they rightfully deserved.

Captain Hutt made lasting contributions in other forms of media with a series of radio talks entitled "Barbadian Heritage" and television shows presenting the island's natural and cultural heritage. Twenty years later these radio and television programs are still aired and one cannot fail to be impressed by his detailed knowledge of the various subject matters and the ease and simplicity with which it was conveyed to the audience.

During the 1960s, Captain Hutt recognized the need to protect the birds from the activities of the shooting fraternity, with

which he had become increasingly uneasy. Perhaps the turning point occurred on 4 September 1963 when he was called to identify a bird shot earlier that day. It was an Eskimo Curlew (*Numenius borealis*), the last confirmed record of this species, which in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had gone from abundant to virtually extinct because of excessive hunting. In the mid-1970s, Captain Hutt took on the task of producing a revised list of birds that should be protected by law to update the 1907 legislation, which only afforded protection to 13 species. As a result of his efforts, the number of species protected increased in 1978 to 48, including four of the rarer migrant shorebirds. It was his hope that this amendment would be the first installment of a phased program to complete protection of all bird life on the island, both resident and migratory. Through his newspaper columns, he articulated the need for further protection and, in particular, the cessation of shorebird shooting. This met with vehement opposition from the shooting clubs, who wielded their influence to block such a proposal. This created much bitterness between the parties, costing Captain Hutt and his wife many friends. Before his death in Barbados on November 22, 1998, Captain Hutt was delighted to hear that the western section of Graeme Hall swamp, which was under threat of development, had been purchased by a philanthropist and would be turned into a nature sanctuary. The preservation of Graeme Hall was a cause he had advocated for many years and provided hope that other areas of conservation for which he had rallied during his life would be fulfilled in the not too distant future.

Whereas the island's birdlife was his primary focus, he pursued many other avenues of interest pertaining to Barbados. He became intimately familiar with most parts of the island by undertaking regular hikes to the less well known areas, such as in the rugged

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Scotland District, a hobby few locals practiced. In addition, the island's geography, history, customs and folklore were intensively studied and he quickly became a recognized authority on Barbadian affairs. He and his wife were avid photographers and together they took countless pictures of Barbados in all its moods and seasons. These were used in their weekly slide shows of the island presented to visitors at several hotels for over a decade starting in the early 1970s. He was a member of the Barbados National Trust for many years and served as a Council Member for several years. Captain Hutt authored several reports for the Barbados National Trust including the need to have the Scotland District declared a national park, an objective he lobbied for many years which, unfortunately, is still to be realized. From the mid-1970s through the early 1980s, he became very well

acquainted with the island's plants and their communities through accompanying his friend, E.B. Gooding, the local authority on botany, on regular field trips. He was also a founding member of the Barbados Rally Club in the late 1950s and actively assisted in the organization of events as well as being their spokesperson for many years.

Captain Hutt was one of those remarkable individuals one encounters who was widely read, could converse on almost any topic, and was always willing to share his knowledge and expertise. The love of birds and their conservation was the essence of his life and so it is only fitting that he left generous bequeaths to several bird conservation institutions. He will be sorely missed. — Martin Frost, Featherbed Lane, St. John, Barbados; *E-mail:* mfrost@hornabbot.bb.