

Obituaries

FLORENCE EVA CRACKLES

1918–2007

Eva once told me that her father taking her for walks in the countryside first introduced her to the wonders of nature. Eva's father was unemployed for many years and despite a tough domestic economy and wartime in her native Kingston upon Hull, she managed to achieve a Bachelor of Science (General) Degree (External, London) in mathematics and chemistry at age 22 years. Her mathematics tutor was Dr Jacob 'Bruno' Bronowski, and it was clear that this great man influenced Eva's intellectual and philosophical development, and that her father sowed the first seed of a flourishing career in the study of natural history.

In 1941 Eva started teaching in Hull then, briefly in Cambridge, before spending the remainder of her active teaching career at home. Her first venture into organised study of natural history came by joining the Hull Scientific and Field Naturalists Club in 1941 and thereafter she was introduced to the Yorkshire Naturalists Union (Y.N.U.) in 1943. At that time Eva divided her interest between birds and botany. In the field of ornithology she became seemingly physically attached to the Spurn peninsula, at first for its birds. In the early 1950's Eva's interest in birds waned as greater interest in plants took hold. The wartime bombing of Hull had produced oases of wildflowers on derelict sites and Eva's early accounts of these, her project writing '*Crackles Country*' for the Hull Daily Mail and her work on the evening class lecture circuit for the Workers' Educational Association launched Eva into recognition by both the public and academia. Bob Lewis introduced her to the B.S.B.I. and she soon took the reins as recorder for vice county 61 (S.E. Yorkshire), both for the B.S.B.I. and for the Y.N.U. In 1956 Eva replaced her bicycle with motorcycle and her botanising thereafter became less parochial and more rewarding. Her studies and participation in B.S.B.I. events took her to East Anglia, the Northern Isles and Scandinavia where she made lifelong friends. In her capacity as recorder for the B.S.B.I., she was now able to contribute to the Atlas of the British Flora and coordinated the recording activity of local botanists.



Eva Crackles (photograph taken in 1990).

Eva was elected to Fellowship of the Linnean Society of London in 1966. Research on *Calamagrostis stricta*, *C. canescens* and their hybrids found at Leven Canal led to a Masters Degree from the University of Hull in 1978. In the 1980's, following the Wildlife and Countryside Act, Eva was engaged in assessing the botanical importance of various sites identified as potential Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Then, in 1990, after an enormous amount of research involving many local botanists, Eva published, "The Flora of the East Riding of Yorkshire". It was shortly after this that Eva's mobility declined and she became wheelchair-bound in the field. I got to know Eva at this time and soon became her chauffeur and honorary wheelchair-pusher on some botanical excursions. I soon learned to ignore Eva complaining, "I wish you would find smoother terrain, I'm trying to make notes", for the learning experience of accompanying Eva in the field was the best available and free of charge.

In 1991, Hull University conferred upon Eva the Degree of Doctor of Science *honoris causa* and then, in 1992, Her Majesty the Queen graciously granted Membership of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) for her work in conservation. In 1998 the B.S.B.I. launched the Atlas 2000 project, but with failing health Eva realised that she could no longer cope with such a massive undertaking, and she retired as B.S.B.I. recorder and from the Linnean Society. Eva was elected Honorary Life member of the B.S.B.I. in 2000, by which time she had become incapable of caring for herself. Eva was also a supporter of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, the South

Holderness Country-side Society and the East Yorkshire Local History Society. The range of subjects covered in Eva's published works (q.v.) is broad but can be summarised as, "a study of plant distribution with analysis of why".

Eva's training in mathematics and chemistry made her very intense and scientifically exacting in all that she did and she had a formidable memory for detail. However, many will have witnessed occasions of a dry sense of humour and warmth when engaged in the subject of cricket or her fascinating family history.

PETER J. COOK

Selected List of Publications of Eva Crackles (1918–2007)

The following list is from the B.S.B.I. Literature database supplemented with local articles published since 1966.

- Crackles, E. (1966). Three Umbellifers at the northern edge of their range. *Naturalist (Hull)*, Ser. 3, **1966**: 49–51.
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- Crackles, E. (1967). Some plant records by Robert Teesdale with special reference to the East Yorkshire flora. *Naturalist (Hull)*, Ser. 3, **1967**: 34–47.
- Crackles, E. (1968). Plant records: East Riding. *Naturalist (Hull)*, Ser. 3, **1968**: 20–21.
- Crackles, E. (1968). Some plant associations of the river Hull valley. *E. Yorkshire Field Stud.* **1**: 13–24.
- Crackles, E. (1969). Plant records: East Riding. *Naturalist (Hull)*, Ser. 3, **1969**: 21–22.
- Crackles, E. (1970). Plant records: East Riding. *Naturalist (Hull)*, Ser. 3, **1970**: 29–30.
- Crackles, E. (1971). Plant records: East Riding. *Naturalist (Hull)*, Ser. 3, **1971**: 25–26.
- Crackles, E. (1971). Arable weeds in East Yorkshire. *E. Yorkshire Field Stud.* **3**: 1–14.
- Crackles, E. (1972). Plants records: East Riding. *Naturalist (Hull)*, Ser. 3, **1972**: 38–40.
- Crackles, E. (1974). Seeking to understand the flora of the East Riding of Yorkshire. *Naturalist (Hull)*, Ser. 3, **1974**: 1–17.
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- Crackles, F. E. (1981). Reports of field meetings 1979: Spurn Point, S. E. Yorkshire. 11th August. *Watsonia*, **13**: 254.
- Crackles, E. (1981). Botanical report for 1978 – Flowering plants and ferns, East Yorkshire (v.c. 61). *Naturalist (Hull)*, Ser. 3, **1981**: 31–32.
- Crackles, E. (1981). Botanical report for 1979 – Flowering plants and ferns, East Yorkshire (v.c. 61). *Naturalist (Hull)*, Ser. 3, **1981**: 35–36.
- Crackles, E. (1981). Botanical report for 1980 – Flowering plants and ferns, East Yorkshire (v.c. 61). *Naturalist (Hull)*, Ser. 3, **1981**: 149–150.
- Crackles, F. E. (1982). *Stratiotes aloides* L. in the East Riding of Yorkshire. *Naturalist (Hull)*, Ser. 3, **1982**: 99–101.

- Crackles, F. E. (1983). *Stratiotes aloides* L. in S. E. Yorks. – A fruitful search or a hoodwink? *Watsonia*, **14**: 451.
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DAVID PAUL STEVENS
(1958–2007)

With the premature death of David Stevens on 24 April 2007, Wales lost its foremost authority on the floristic composition, distribution and ecology of species-rich pastures and hay meadows. We and many other of his close working friends and colleagues have also lost a mentor and a highly talented conservation scientist.

David was born and brought up in Redditch in the west Midlands, and whilst at school in his mid teens developed a strong interest in field botany and natural history that was to last for the rest of his life. He was drawn at an early age to applying a scientific approach to understanding the natural world. He joined the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust at the age of 17, and began to appreciate the floristic interest of remnant unimproved grasslands, such as Eades Meadow, in that county.

But it was as an undergraduate at the University of Leicester that his future career began to take shape, particularly under the influence of Clive Stace; he joined the B.S.B.I. in 1980 and became fascinated by field studies in ecology and evolution, gaining a first class honours degree in Biological Sciences in 1979. He subsequently became a research student of John Richards at the University of Newcastle, working on genetic adaptation in the Meadow Saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata* and completing his PhD in 1985. His discovery that this species is gynodioecious, with populations having both hermaphrodite and male-sterile individuals (Stevens & Richards 1985; Stevens 1988), was later supplemented by a modelling approach to evolutionary aspects of gynodioecy (Stevens & van Damme 1988). David then worked in a busy teaching post in the Genetics Department at the University of Wales, Swansea, between 1984–1987, where he and Quentin Kay undertook a review of British dioecious flowering plant species (Kay & Stevens 1986). In his subsequent career in conservation, David continued to take an active, if sideline, interest in plant reproductive biology and sexual systems, including a wide-ranging study of gynodioecy in British populations of the Hare's-tail Cottongrass *Eriophorum vaginatum* (Stevens & Blackstock 1997).

David's working life undertook a major change of direction in 1988 when he joined the Nature Conservancy Council in Bangor (later in 1991 to become the Countryside Council for



Wales) as its leading specialist in grassland conservation. His initial work concentrated on directing an intensive floristic and plant community survey of different forms of remnant species-rich grasslands across the lowland landscapes of Wales. Although now well characterised, it is important to realise that at that time the Welsh grassland resource was poorly known, with many key sites unprotected and no real concept of the character or variation of the resource across Wales. Execution of this survey meant coming to grips with the new “neo-phytosociological” approach to community recognition and mapping that came to life in the British conservation scene through the development and publication of the *National Vegetation Classification* (Rodwell 1991–2000). He encouraged his survey team to adopt a critical approach to all aspects of their work, including plant identification, and many new and interesting records, such as those for *Carex montana* in *Molinia* vegetation (Stevens *et al.* 1994), were distributed to B.S.B.I. recorders. By 2004, when the survey was completed, over 1000 sites had been recorded and mapped (digitally), supported by some 10,000 relevés. The findings have transformed the conservation prospects for this habitat in Wales, with the best surviving unimproved neutral, acid, calcareous and marshy grasslands put clearly on the map, and as a result many now notified as S.S.S.I.

Through the 1990s, David's role as a conservation scientist with C.C.W. became increasingly influential. He became leader of a team of ecological specialists, commissioning, publishing and interpreting new research to benefit habitat protection programmes and new countryside conservation initiatives, and more generally providing science advice for all aspects of terrestrial habitat conservation in Wales. Much of this work takes place behind the scenes in government-sponsored conservation agencies, but a rigorous and often original approach is fundamental to providing the evidence-base for those engaged in policy development and conservation applications at field level. David was highly skilled and well-suited to this work, typically with a keen and influential sense of the direction we should take. He was especially influential in the development of the first all-Wales agri-environment scheme, and also contributed hugely to the development and subsequent implementation of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan in Wales. One outcome of the latter concerned his work to disaggregate our *Habitat Survey of Wales* data-set (run in conjunction with the grassland survey by Liz Howe) for use by the new Local BAP partnerships (Jones *et al.* 2003). He also used his understanding of genetics to review the policy position in this field of conservation (Stevens & Blackstock 1997b). Before his illness struck in late 2005, he was developing an interest in the current landscape-scale perspective for habitat conservation in response to environmental change.

David was endearingly modest, thoughtful and helpful to others and he was a key formative influence in the career development of many conservation scientists. There is little

doubt that David would have excelled in academia, being both a gifted teacher and researcher, but his career path was ultimately to the immense gain of nature conservation; his conviction that it could only be pursued effectively when firmly under-pinned by scientific evidence remains as a continuing influence among his many colleagues in the conservation world. Perhaps less widely appreciated was David's humanity and compassion. Many of those close to him in C.C.W. had direct experience of this over the years, and this quality combined with his rare intellect made him one of those people that one is truly blessed to have known.

When David was diagnosed with an incurable brain tumour in January 2006, a strong and remarkable aspect of his character emerged. He confronted the diagnosis directly and courageously, accepted that he had to undergo difficult and harrowing treatment, and determined to live as fully as possible with his family and at work through his final months. His very open and honest approach, set out in widely distributed newsletters, was truly inspiring for all of us in close connection. He worked hard through this period on a book-length account of Welsh grasslands, as well as a synopsis of the survey he oversaw (Stevens *et al.* 2007). Throughout this time, he and his wife Jane kept a happy and active home life with their sons Clive and Glyn. In his personal memoir, written in hospital during 2006, David hoped that he 'will be remembered fondly and with a sense of celebration' rather than sadness. Of course, those close to David have been profoundly moved by his passing, but he did indeed give us considerable cause for celebration.

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T. H. BLACKSTOCK & P. S. JONES

