

Obituary

Huw Idwal Griffiths 1958-2002

On 12 June 2002, Dr. Huw I. Griffiths, member of the editorial board of *Scopolia*, passed away in hospital in Hull, UK. Huw was born to Martha and Idwal Griffiths in Louth, Lincolnshire, England, on 14 May 1958. He is survived by his wife Dr. Jane M. Reed, an internationally recognised authority on diatoms, and by their three-year-old son Thomas.

Huw's keen interest in nature, and animals in particular, developed early on during his childhood. In spite of this, it was not until later in his life that the opportunity arose to pursue these interests. After finishing secondary school, Huw opted out of university and spent many years going from job to job in the search of a purpose in his life. This wandering period probably contributed to Huw's colourful character, which made him a unique personality as well as an indisputable authority in the scientific community. It was at the age of 27 when he chose zoology as his future career, obtaining a first class BSc Hons degree in zoology from the University of Wales in June 1988. During his undergraduate training, Huw was known by his supervisors (with whom he was still in touch until very recently) for his boundless enthusiasm, while his outstanding academic merit was reflected in his receipt of the Edith Sheppard and Tattersall Exhibition Awards for the best second year work in Zoology and for final year research, respectively. As a promising young scientist Huw continued his studies at the University of Wales where he received his MPhil in April 1992. His thesis entitled "*The conservation status of the Eurasian badger (Meles meles L., 1758) (Carnivora, Mustelidae) in western Europe*" is still the most complete study on this topic. The results have been published as several original scientific papers, while the thesis in its entirety served as the basis for the Report to the Permanent Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats at the Council of Europe. Not content with this, however, Huw embarked on his PhD research whilst still working on the MPhil, completing his thesis on freshwater ostracod crustacea in May 1995 (University of Wales) entitled: "*The application of freshwater Ostracoda to the reconstruction of Late Quaternary Palaeoenvironments in North-western Europe*".



The PhD and MPhil research were carried out while Huw was employed as a Research Technician at the School of Pure & Applied Biology, University of Wales College of Cardiff (1988-1989), a Research Assistant at the School of History & Archaeology at the same University (1989-1992), and a Research Associate at the Department of Genetics, University of Leeds (1992-1995). Huw then succeeded in obtaining a permanent lectureship in September 1995 in the Department of Geography, University of Hull, being promoted to Senior Lecturer in October 2000. Huw's last years in Hull were a happy period in his life. After so many years of tensions, pressures and uncertainties, he finally settled down and, even more importantly, established a family, which remained the focus of his private life. Equally, Huw was very relaxed at work and enjoyed the company of his colleagues and students in Hull. He was the mainstay of a dynamic research group of colleagues, external

collaborators and students involved both in the field of environmental change in aquatic ecosystems and that of mammalian biogeography and conservation. In addition, he loved teaching and enjoyed working with enthusiastic students.

Unlike many scientists, Huw was renowned for the diversity and breadth of his interests, which often gave him a novel outlook on how to tackle a scientific problem in the best possible way. As noted, these spanned a range of fields from mammalian ecology to freshwater biology and extended in recent times to combining pure and social scientific approaches to solving complex issues. Within this, his major specialisation was to combine modern and ancient datasets from species with excellent fossil records (notably mammals and ostracod crustaceans) to elucidate long-timescale evolutionary and biogeographic patterns, and to use these as analogues in modelling the effects of rapid modern environmental and climate change. The use of freshwater ostracods for the reconstruction of Quaternary palaeoenvironments and recent environmental histories involved studies of both modern and fossil faunas, and also the construction of experimental studies to examine carbon and oxygen isotope uptake in the shells of living ostracods.

Evidently, Huw was much attracted by complex issues and one of his last projects was to bring together key workers from different fields concerned with Balkan biodiversity. To this end he co-organised a successful exploratory workshop "*Pattern and Process in Balkan Biodiversity*" in September 2001, sponsored by the European Science Foundation and the Ministry of Science and Research of the Republic of Slovenia. This meeting well reflects Huw's close contacts he maintained with Slovene scientists since his first visit to the country in summer 1992. His strongest collaboration was with the vertebratologists from the Slovenian Museum of Natural History, but he was also in touch with a number of other researchers with shared interests. Being slightly disappointed that his frequent proposals for upgrading the collaboration between the Slovenian Natural History Museum and the University of Hull did not receive support from the Museum's authorities, Huw enthusiastically joined a small research group of the newly-founded Institute for Biodiversity Studies at the Science and Research Centre of the Republic of Slovenia Koper from its inception in summer 2001. This collaboration was extremely fruitful and resulted in the organisation of the aforementioned "*Pattern and Process in Balkan Biodiversity*" workshop in September 2001, only a few months after the Institute was formed. For Huw's key role in the preparation of the meeting, as well as for his outstanding scientific output, the Science and Research Centre of the Republic of Slovenia Koper elected him a research associate.

During his short scientific career, Huw had a prodigious research output; he had become a recognised leading authority on the use of freshwater Ostracoda in palaeoecological work and biological monitoring and, equally, was well known for his work on carnivores. What is particularly sad is that Huw did not have time enough to develop fully as a scientist. He died full of ideas and plans and right in the middle of a pile of unfinished work. In spite of Huw's spectacular scientific career and impressive bibliography, he certainly still did not achieve the peak which was promised by his work to date and by his brilliant mind. More extensive obituaries will appear in forthcoming issues of *Folia Zoologica*, *Small carnivore Conservation*, and *Annales*; *Annales* will also publish a complete bibliographic list.

The editorial board of *Scopolia* as well as Huw's collaborators in Slovenia and abroad lost a devoted and loyal friend and we know only too well that we won't ever meet another like him. Huw enriched our lives tremendously and influenced our professional careers. His name will continue to survive in science, as his figure will never fade in the memory of those of us who have had the privilege of being his friends.

Boris Kryštufek

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