

## Trevor Beer MBE, Writer and Wildlife Artist, 1937 - 2017

Trevor Beer MBE was born on The Rock at Pilton on the 14th January 1937. He went to Pilton School next to St Mary's Church and his boyhood haunts were Shearford Lane, Tutshill Woods and Mannings Pit. Trevor passed for Grammar School but his parents couldn't afford the uniform so he went to the boy's Secondary Modern (known by the boys as Derby College). Mr Uglow (English teacher) and Mr Fern (Art Teacher) gave him private lessons after school and he was the first boy to obtain a General Certificate of Education. So, in later years his occupation was Writer and Wildlife Artist – how appropriate!

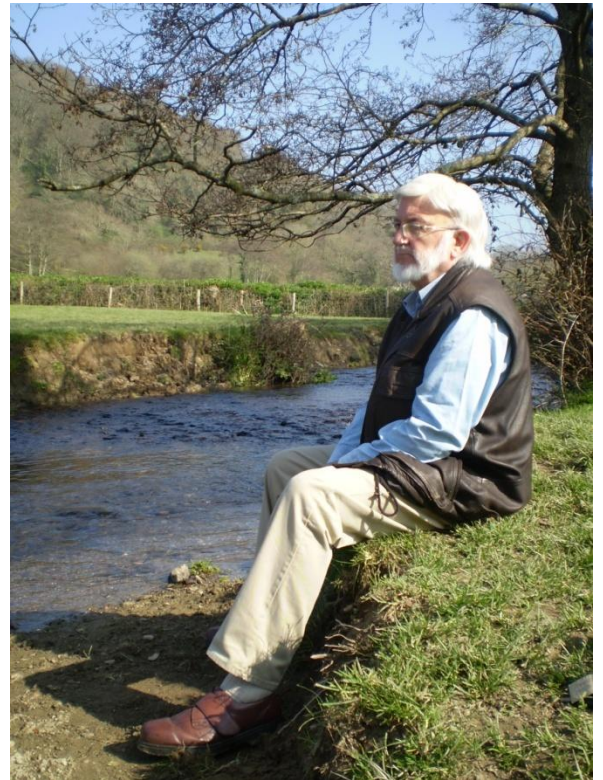
Trevor was also an avid Chess Player for the Barnstaple Chess Club and during the 1960s he won the North Devon Chess Championship. He won a signed copy of a book written by the 3 times British Champion, Harry Golombek, by holding Golombek to a draw in an Exhibition Match.

Trevor had a great empathy for young people keen to learn about the countryside. He ran an award winning field club for 40 enthusiastic youngsters for many years. Among his many accolades, were *The Gavin Maxwell Award for Otter Conservation*, *The British Naturalists' Associations David Bellamy Award for Nature Conservation* and His MBE awarded to him in 2002 for journalism and environment. He was also a champion of the North Devon Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and was always keen to help preserve the wild habitats in which our British Flora and Fauna thrives. We also need this for our well-being and for the health of future generations. He was a man of great foresight. To mention all of Trevor's achievements would take a considerable time, but many are listed below this article for your interest.

Besides being a wildlife expert, and an expert on the British Big Cat situation, Trevor did a lot of work for the BBC Natural History Unit in Bristol, helping the team locate various species for their films – In fact he could find himself in some rather precarious locations at times. I recall him saying that it was a little disconcerting when a cow decided to scratch itself on his portable hide while he was still inside birdwatching. The whole thing started to collapse resulting in his speedy exit!

He had a nick name, which was acquired because he was always in the field birdwatching or recording natural history species. Therefore he had to dress to blend in with the countryside, so as not to frighten away the wildlife he wished to observe. So well camouflaged was he that on one occasion, a treecreeper hopped up his leg causing great amusement – from then on, he was nick-named Tree. He rehabilitated thousands of sick and injured animals back into the wild. He would receive call outs from Inspector Waddleton of the RSPB, from the police and from other organisations. He would respond voluntarily in a bid to help the animal in distress and even founded a charity 'Countryside Matters' to help spread awareness of nature's plight.

On one occasion, a frightened badger was rescued from a development site at Roundswell and taken to Mullacott Vets. Trevor was called to re-home the seemingly docile badger. He called his friend Jerry Hannafin from J & A Cameras who meticulously set up a hide and infra-red camera in Trevor's woodland sanctuary, the idea being that when the badger was released it would trundle off breaking the infra-red beams and thus setting off the camera providing a record of the animals safe release, but things didn't go quite according to plan. When we arrived in the woodlands that evening the badger suddenly became alert, sniffing every which



Trevor Beer's greatest wish was to protect wildlife habitats, especially his childhood haunts of Tutshill Woods, Shearford Lane and Bradiford Water (above) and to save Mannings Pit from development.

way as if trying to detect where it was. Jerry gave the nod and Trevor opened the door of the carrier and within a split second the badger shot off like a rocket. All he got was a very nice picture of its rear end disappearing into the woodland.

On another occasion, Trevor received a late night call from the police... could they pick him up and help with an emergency – a couple had found a tropical snake in their bedroom, under their bed! On arrival, the policeman tried to reassure the couple, who were standing in the garden, refusing to enter the house until the snake had been captured. It was a cold night, they were shivering and anxious. Trevor entered the house wearing his trusty wellington boots, to save from being bitten on the ankle, his gauntlets and had a forked thumb-stick and a torch. Having made a thorough inspection of the bedroom and finding nothing, he searched the rest of the house. He came back out into the garden saying he couldn't find a snake, and that the only thing under the bed was a rather strikingly patterned tie! The gentleman flushed red, and his wife who had been fraught with panic, had a few things to say to her husband, at which point Trevor and the policeman left, tactfully hiding their amusement.

Trevor was licensed to photograph certain endangered species of birds and he did a lot of recording for the RSPB and BTO, which is well documented.

Over the years Trevor has been rightly described in the newspapers as an Ambassador for Nature and even a National Treasure. Equally importantly, Trevor was a husband, a father, and grandfather and a great grandfather, but he was equally adored by his readers who would send him the most wonderful letters with wildlife queries and observations. He had written in the Western Morning News since 1993 (24 years without missing a day). He was still working at 80 years old. He never retired. In fact, the word retirement was taboo. At the time of his death he had just finished an article for Exmoor Magazine and begun a new book - this time on sparrowhawks. His tenacity, dedication and talent made him a remarkable man, but he was also compassionate. He cared so much about saving the wild habitats, in which the British flora and fauna he studied and loved so much, needed in order to survive. He fought and achieved SSSI Status for the whole of the Bradiford Valley. He was passionate about preserving the countryside generally and especially the Bradiford Valley including Mannings Pit and the Pilton he grew up in. He was a pioneer for nature conservation, an inspiration and the world is a poorer place without him. His legacy will live on in the wonderfully illustrative pictures many of us are lucky enough to have on our walls, in the many books and articles that he wrote, in the many habitats he fought to save and in the generations of species that continue to live in those habitats, but also in those of us who learnt about nature from his teachings and in all of the good things he achieved.

### **Wildlife Artist, Columnist, Author, Naturalist, Environmentalist - a true countryman.**

#### **A Celebration of some of Trevor Beer's achievements over the years.**

- Trevor was elected Wildlife Champion for North Devon Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (2005).
- Member of the British Empire (MBE) Awarded January 2002 in Queen's New Year's Honours List for Journalism & Environment.
- He won the David Bellamy Award for Conservation - awarded by the British Naturalist's Association (BNA) in May 2001. He was made an Honorary Member of the BNA (2002) for work in nature conservation, and shortly afterwards, was an Elected Fellow of the BNA. (FBNA)
- The Education Category Winner in the Devon Environmental Business Initiative Awards (DEBI) in 2000 in conjunction with the Western Morning News.
- Fellow of the Zoological Society. (FZS)
- Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society. (FRES)
- Member of the British Ornithologists Union. (MBOU)
- North Devon Conservation Society Award (1990)
- Former Hon. Sec. North Devon Civic Society for 11 years. (1969-1980)

- Pilton West Parish Councillor for 25 years and 9 years as Chairman - Also Tree and Way Warden.
- Served on North Devon District Council for one term. (Did not seek re-election).
- Founded the RSPB North Devon group.
- Founded the Taw & Torridge Estuary Forum.
- Founded the Taw & Exmoor Branch of the British Naturalist's Association. (BNA)
- Former Council member of the Devon Bird Watching & Preservation Society. (1980's)
- Member of the Royal Air Force Ornithological Society. (RAFOS)
- Member of the Army Ornithological Society.
- Former member of the M.O.D Conservation Committee.
- A Founder member of the Society for Wildlife Art for the Nations. (SWAN)
- Trevor Beer won the Gavin Maxwell Award for the Conservation of Otters in the wild in 1979.
- With his field club, 'The Shearford Lane Study Group', they were awarded the European Architectural Heritage Year Coca Cola Youth Awards for a project on Castle Mound. (1976)
- Devon Wildlife Trust Committee Member - North Devon Branch (1970s)
- Wildlife artist, photographer and author of several nature books, including Tourist Guides on Natural History subjects.

Trevor produced nature, farm and urban trails, book illustrations including finely detailed black and white line drawings. He was a leading authority on the Big Cats in Britain situation and on Folklore & Legend generally and has led hundreds of guided walks over many years.

Trevor took in and healed over 4000 sick and injured wild birds and animals since the 1960's, from the public, police and local vets. Set up the North Devon Oiled Bird Rescue Group following the Christos Bitos oil spillage incident.

Trevor ran his own Field Club for 40 youngsters for 10 years, winning the Better Britain Competition in 1974 and the European Architectural Heritage Award in 1975. He produced North Devon's first Nature Trails for schools and public use. He also produced the first Barnstaple Urban Trail in the 1970's.

Trevor was still writing on Natural History for the Western Morning News, Exmoor Magazine & Dartmoor News until his last days in this life. He had written for many publications over the years, particularly Devon Life Magazine, the North Devon Gazette and Advertiser (as it was known then), Cornish Guardian, West Briton, North Devon Journal and Country Lovers magazine to name but a few.

His series in the Western Morning News, reached thousands of people every day and really helped in spreading public awareness of the plight of wildlife species. The Western Morning News Wildlife Millennium Project was his own initiative and was a huge success. Readers from all walks of life responded dedicating their gardens, hedgerows etc., to wildlife. The initial target was to reach 1000 acres but now we are well over 6500 acres! He gave all his readers, on request, free advice on how to make their havens better for wildlife.

In 1980 he helped young offenders via the Probation Office understand wildlife with a project which had them involved in making nest boxes and bat boxes. 15 young people were involved. Via the Wildlife Millennium Project with the Western Morning News the Probation Office at Exeter recently became involved again. R.G.B at Umberleigh, provided the timber for bird and bat boxes. This meant free bird and bat boxes to readers if required as part of the Haven scheme.

Not many people know that Trevor served his National Service with the Bomber Command of the RAF attached to the Fleet Air Arm at Weston Zoyland, Somerset 1955-1957. He has led a very interesting life.

### **Trevor's Books.**

- **14 tourist guides** on Birds, Wildflowers & other aspects on Natural History as well as Castles, Beaches, Footpath Walks, etc, both regionally & nationally - most recently Bossiney Books / Tormark, Cornwall.

- **'The Beast of Exmoor, Fact or Legend'** (1981) Published by Countryside Productions, Devon.
- **'Poacher's Days'** (1981) Published by Countryside Productions, Devon.
- **'Devon's Wild Mammals'** (1982) Published by Badger Books, Devon.
- **'Tarka Country'** (1993) Published by Badger Books, Devon.
- **'Tarka Country Revisited'** (2004) Published by North Devon Books.
- **'Devon's Mysterious Walks'** (1997) Published by Sigma Leisure, Cheshire.
- **'Nature Watch'** (1998) Published by Halsgrove.
- **'Trevor Beer's Wildlife of North Devon'** (2001) Published by Halsgrove.
- **'Old Red', the Story of a Devon Fox'** (2002) Published by Halsgrove.
- **'Trevor Beer's Country Folklore & Legend'** (2006) Published by Halsgrove.
- **'Five Owl's'** (2007) Published by Halsgrove.
- Trevor and J & A Cameras made a bird DVD **'Trevor Beer's Birds'** (2007)
- **'Down Memory Lane'** (2007) Published by Halsgrove.
- **'Merlin'** the story of a Westcountry leopard (2008) Published by Halsgrove.
- **'Nature Watch 2'** (2009) Published by Halsgrove.
- **'Nature Watch 3'** (2013) Published by Halsgrove.

Please contact: Robin Beer for further information on books at [robinsbeer@aol.com](mailto:robinsbeer@aol.com).

### Selected Projects.

Donated 2 black & white line drawings to 'Help The Elephant Charity' auction in Nairobi, Kenya which fetched in the region of £800 - £900 for the charity.

Donated art work to the Devon Wildlife Trust to help raise funds and to various schools and charities.

'Roving Nature Trails' for schools, a project whereby laminated information nature boards were produced, written and illustrated by Trevor Beer and given to the North Devon Area Education authority to use whenever they wished.

In collaboration with the Young Farmer's Club, Trevor designed the Nature Trail which surrounded Fremington Training Army Camp. Sadly the beautiful oak framed information boards and nest boxes were badly vandalised. However, the trail was restored and relocated within the camp boundaries opposite 'The Ship' in the recreational zone / nature reserve which Trevor and Endymion maintained under the aegis of Lt Col Michael Whitely - Trevor having served on the M.O.D Conservation Committee for many years.

Church Nature Trails... a project with nature boards with texts and illustrations instigated by Trevor Beer specifically for individual churches to put up on their notice boards, to help explain the wildlife of the respective graveyards. Churches involved included Barnstaple Parish Church, Fremington, Instow, Eggesford, and Arlington.

Trevor Beer wrote 'the Natural History Notes', for "The Flora and Fauna of the Bible" for his friend, colleague and namesake Endymion Beer's book, which was published in 2007 by Halsgrove. It is a family book which helps link the flora and fauna of the Bible to the British Isles.

Trevor instigated the Westcountry Library Wildlife Information Boards with Endymion Beer whereby bi-monthly sheets are provided free to all libraries in Cornwall, Devon and Somerset.

The 1999 project was to save wildflowers from development. A scheme whereby if anyone knows of development in progress where wild flowers were being uprooted, Trevor would arrange to collect and replant them elsewhere in the countryside. The project was supported by the Western Morning News.

*Endymion Beer*