

Valediction for John W. Meiklejohn (1926-2019)

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John Meiklejohn was an enthusiastic observer of wildlife and in my experience that enthusiasm never waned, even after he contracted Shingles during October 2009.

For a period of thirty years from 1984 John visited us here on numerous occasions and with the exception of 1985 never missed a year, although I had known him for some time prior to that. Usually he would bring an obscure insect for an opinion that either he or someone else had found. John's interest in Worcestershire's insects evidently began during 1951 whilst at Worcester Teacher Training College when he recorded a regional rarity, the Rose Chafer, in Worcester City. I have seen thousands of these but none in Worcestershire.

John clearly had an enquiring mind and went on to make many significant discoveries not only in Worcestershire. Foremost perhaps was a finding that still remains unique in Britain, namely of the specialised predatory bug *Oncocephalus pilicornis* on the floodplain at Defford (Whitehead, 2006), a species that should still be searched for. While at nearby St James Church he observed Death Watch Beetle and made the singular discovery in April 1992 that the localised clerid beetle *Opilo mollis* was a predator of them that could accept structural timber. In 2001 John set pitfall traps along his privet boundary hedge at Defford and obtained four *Leiodes rugosa*, a nationally scarce subterranean beetle little-known in the English midlands and hitherto not known to be synanthropic.

Further afield he discovered the Bombardier Beetle *Brachinus crepitans* behaving anthropogenically in ballast at Honeybourne railway sidings during 2001. On 25 June 2003 John discovered a completely melanic two-spot ladybird in the grounds of Bredon School at Pull Court, Bushley (Whitehead, 2007). In 2004 he recorded *Epuraea rufomarginata* from traditional orchards west of Bewdley, the stenotopic tenebrionid beetle *Prionychus melanarius* on oak at Spetchley Park and the declined impressive predatory ground beetle *Carabus monilis* at Stow-on-the-Wold.

John was quick to keep up with expansive species publishing (Meiklejohn, 2005) the spread of a thistle-associated weevil *Rhinocyllus conicus* in the midlands during and after 2005 when he also observed the naturalised and now widespread *Clambus simsoni*. Later during July 2007 he was one of the first observers to encounter the mirid *Deraeocoris flavilinea* in Worcestershire. Sometimes interesting insects visited John; he found the vividly green floodplain specialist *Chlaenius nigricornis* inside his porch at Defford on 21 May 2001!

John was creative in his pursuit of biological information and during 1995 successfully recorded Glow-worms mating at Westmancote by setting up a night camera (Fig. 01). His time at the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre meant that he often named insects for other people and if these overwhelmed him I would often get to see them; the intensely yellow form of the usually green shield bug *Palomena prasina* remains memorable.



01. Glow-worms mating at night, Westmancote, Worcestershire, 7 July 1995. J.W. Meiklejohn leg.

John was an enterprising individual as was made clear when I attended his outstanding illustrated talk of independent travel through Greece with his young family after the war. He was also well organised and often discussed the crops, or impacts of badgers on them, in his Defford garden. As a widower he developed a disciplined regime of freezing home-cooked meals in bulk. When John eventually left Defford I was able to acquire from him a triangular horticultural drill-cutting tool-cum-hoe with the blade set at 90° to its handle which has now been well-used by me; in this way I have perhaps been able to maintain John's horticultural interests.

After moving to Pershore John continued to correspond with me but at a reduced rate and when I began to receive the same images maybe two or three times a year it was clear that John's vitality was sadly reducing. It was however no hardship to respond to him.

References

- Meiklejohn, J., 2005. Inland records of *Rhinocyllus conicus* (Frölich, 1792) (Curculionidae). *The Coleopterist* **14**:114-115.
- Whitehead, P.F., 2006. *Oncocephalus pilicornis* Reuter, 1882 (Hemiptera, Reduviidae, Stenopodainae) new to the British fauna with comments on British primary S26 plant communities. *Entomologist's Monthly Magazine* **142**:235-241.
- Whitehead, P.F., 2007. Some incidences of variation in British Coleoptera. *Entomologist's Gazette* **58**:35-38.

These notes are based on observations passed to John's daughter Mrs Annie Broderick on 17 July 2019