

## OBITUARIES

### **Phyl Wood and Bob Wood**

Phyl and Bob Wood died within six weeks of each other in the late spring of 2004 after a very happy and devoted marriage that lasted 62 years. Phyl, (b. 1920) an Islander, enjoyed a very successful career as did Bob (b. 1916) with G.E.C. but the pull of the countryside proved too strong and they gave their jobs up in order to run a village post office and shop at Wretham on the Breckland edge. Here they managed to buy land which was turned into a wildlife refuge, especially for injured birds. In 1978 they had the opportunity to live at Newtown and it was then that they became Society members, bringing with them much natural history experience. They continued their work with injured birds and developed a specialisation in rehabilitating birds of prey, swans and oiled seabirds, and sometimes helping to train new R.S.P.C.A. recruits. In recognition of their work the Society made Phyl an honorary member but did not recognise that Bob took an equal share of the work load as members were quick to see when visiting their garden and aviaries.

Phyl became the Secretary for the Newtown Reserve and was instrumental in setting up the Mercia Seabroke Award with a group of Society members and then acting as a key player in assisting the transfer of Newtown over to the National Trust and English Nature in 1996. In 1997 and after 19 years of volunteering with Bob, as wardens at Newtown they decided to retire to Thorley where they developed another wildlife friendly garden and looked after a few injured birds until 2002.

However it is the “Crows Nest” at Newtown with its wildlife friendly garden, their house full of books, and their warmth and friendliness that members will remember with great affection. Visions of the swan they cut out of the ice at Newtown that took over the garage; the Black throated Diver in the bath; or the Long eared Owl glaring from the owl box in the aviary, will remain in many members minds for a long time.

### **Mercia Seabroke**

Mercia Seabroke joined the Society in 1958, and became the first woman President in 1963, a position of which she was justly proud. Mercia was born at Bishops Waltham on March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1910 and her mother came from a large Romany family. Mercia was very proud of her background and developed a strong independent mind which she put to good use when she moved to Marsh Farm, Newtown. Mercia was married to George Seabroke in 1936 and soon began to appreciate the value of wildlife of the Newtown estuary and the adjacent woodlands. She was already, at that time, an excellent naturalist specialising in botany and ornithology, and her love of sailing enhanced her knowledge of the estuary.

In 1947 Mercia became involved in the monthly wetland bird surveys. She campaigned with other key members in the late 1950s to stop a nuclear power station being built at Hamstead on the western side of the estuary. This led to the realisation of the vulnerability of the whole of Newtown to this kind of threat. In 1960 Mercia and a dedicated band of Society and other interested people helped with the establishment of the Newtown Nature Reserve. Mercia became its first warden and helped to instill a love of natural history in younger visitors with her knowledge and experience.

In 1970 Mercia was awarded the Duke of Edinburgh Countryside Award in recognition of her dedication and hard work at Newtown.

In later years Mercia still maintained a keen interest in her garden, full of unusual plants. She maintained her diaries with all her bird records often illustrated with one of her watercolour paintings. Members of the Society will remember the encouragement she gave to them to pursue their interests

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and it was with this in mind that the Mercia Seabroke Award was set up in the early 1990s to enable members to further their knowledge to the benefit of the society and the Island's wildlife.

The very creation of the Newtown Nature Reserve may never have been realised if Mercia had not shown the drive and vision way back in the 1930s that paved the way for its eventual creation. We have much to thank her for and in October 2005, the bird hide at Newtown was renamed 'The Mercia Seabroke Hide' in recognition of the great contribution that Mercia made to conservation at Newtown.

*Val Gwynn and Barry Angell.*