

Obituary

Ron Daniel, 1938–2015

I still remember meeting Ron for the first time, a large genial man with a generous laugh, firm hand shake and a passion for the natural world. He had just returned to the then Plymouth Polytechnic from his master's degree at Bangor with a keen interest in litter faunas and a special interest in myriapods. So our first conversation was about Tüllgren funnels (he was a man that like to cut to the chase). I remember trying to catch up with the conversation as I had not encountered these before but by the end of the day plans to build a set were drawn and my introduction to the industrial Mecano that was Dexion had also begun.

The Tüllgren funnels became synonymous with Ron, as every student field trip to a woodland habitat was followed by a weeks' worth of processing litter samples in the funnels.

He had a broad approach to the natural world, as he was an excellent botanist and, as he lived on the coast, he reveled in the life on the seashore. But he was equally happy on the moors or heaths of the South West. However, it was in a woodland that he was truly at home. His knowledge of the fauna and flora of all of these habitats was impressive. Like many Cornishmen he appeared to be impervious to the elements and field trips went ahead regardless of the weather. But even Cornishmen have their limits as I recall one day on Dartmoor when the temperature was zero on arrival at the site but just an hour later Ron called a halt to the exercise when the temperature dropped below -12°C .

He lived at Dowederry a small village at the head of the Hessenford valley which ran inland to Bodmin moor. A valley that ran from moorland to rocky shore over a comparatively short distance offered a great diversity of habitats. So rather than driving students across Cornwall and Devon to examine different habitats he focused much of the field days on the valley in order to build a picture of its natural history and conservation potential. It was a plan that worked well and when in the 1980s the department initiated a series of residential field trips Ron seized the moment and ran a week-long ecology course in the Dowederry holiday park, using the village hall as a lab and lecture hall. He gathered a huge data set in an effort to conserve and protect his local valley. So he was delighted when in the 1990s the lower half of the valley became a Cornish Wildlife Trust (CWT) nature reserve.

He did suffer one major embarrassment in the shape of the hunt for the bristly millipede *Polyxenus*. On almost every trip he would stop at a likely piece of habitat and send the minibus full of students searching for it but always to no avail. He had everyone in the department scouring the south west for it, but no luck. Then once its true habitat was discovered, south facing lichen covered walls, Ron realised there was a large population on his garden wall.

As he approached retirement he became involved in local politics, becoming chair of the Parish Council and steering it towards a more ecological approach to managing the parish.

He was a man of great enthusiasm, drive and a dedicated teacher but he did not stand for any nonsense and was deadly accurate with a piece of chalk should students become distracted during his lectures. His contribution to the understanding of Cornish natural history was enormous and his loss has left a space that will take some time to fill.

Peter Smithers



Ron was instrumental in the revival of the British Myriapod Group through the organisation, with Peter, of the first annual field meeting after a pause of some years, with that in Easter 1982 held in Plymouth.

The photograph shows some very young British Myriapodologists at that meeting.

Left to right: Tony Barber, Ron Daniel, Peter Smithers, Doug Richardson, Helen Read, Desmond Kime and Kathleen Kime. We think the picture was taken by Gordon Blower.