

JAMES LEIGH ROSLIN WILLIAMS

5th February 1939 - 4th February 2014

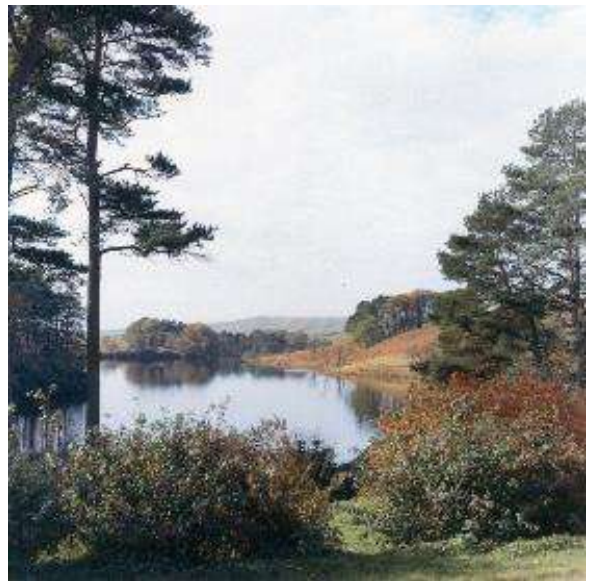
James was born on 5th February 1939, the son of Glenton and Mary Roslin Williams. His father was deputy master, and the huntsman, of the Kendal and District Otterhounds. His mother was very well known for her Mansergh Labrador Retrievers and author of several books. His sister Anne is also an author and equally well known for her Mansergh Border Terriers.



Born into a world of working dogs; gundogs, terriers and pack hounds, James was brought up in the Lune Valley, moving in 1948 from Mansergh to a home with a beautiful lake, woods and little grouse moor at Lilymere, near Sedbergh.

It became an ongoing excitement for James to help his parents restore the wildlife to its right place and levels; clearing and maintaining the spawning beck to assist the trout population in the lake and deterring predation by otters with the use of a swinging paraffin lamp.

It was a perfect place to start his lifelong interests in wildlife, dogs, otters, hunting, fishing and shooting.



James became joint master of his fathers' pack of otterhounds. On the death of his father in 1957, when eighteen years old, James took over the Mansergh Cocker Spaniels, later breeding, training and handling them in field trials. His first was Caroline of Mansergh, winner of nine field trial awards.

James was educated at Harecroft Hall Preparatory School and then Sedbergh School, going on to St Andrews University to study English, accompanied by his spaniel, Caroline. After graduating with an MA (Hons), James taught English at his old prep school and then Strathallan School in Perthshire, before moving to Somerset in 1967 to teach English at Taunton School.



In 1968, James married Elizabeth Stansell, an architect recently emigrated to Canada who was preparing to return, until she met James. They were living in a thatched cottage outside Taunton when their two children, Robert and Scarlett were born. Elizabeth shared James' interests in shooting, fishing and gun dogs. In 1976, James became housemaster of Fairwater and Elizabeth assisted in running the domestic side for more than 50 boarding boys. During his years at Taunton School, James was also the careers master, taking on training of pupils for Ten Tors and orienteering and, after retiring as housemaster, the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. In 1991, he started a Taunton School Otter Group, to run as part of the 6th form general studies programme. The aim was to monitor

the resurgence of the otter population of the River Tone and the Somerset Levels, to test sampling techniques and to assist with national population surveys. The group participated in the Vincent Wildlife Trust survey of pollutants in fish and collected spraints for Essex University's national survey of Polychlorinated Biphenyl (PCB's). James retired from Taunton School in 1994 after twenty-seven years there, and thirty-four years in teaching altogether.

James took a gun on the Triscombe shoot and was shoot captain for eleven years. He once ordered, 'No woodcock on the next drive because one of them isn't, it's a great snipe - a refugee from Siberia.' He would organise the Beaters Day every year; the beaters hut has photographs of James, together with a letter from him on the wall.

James maintained an average of six cocker spaniels. His Mansergh strain of cockers has 81 years of unbroken existence since his father 'bartered' on the foundation bitch, Fuss, in 1932 for five shillings from a Cornish butcher. James only had need for three or four working dogs, but to maintain the strain he needed about six bitches.

James was successful in field trials, winning many competitions with several of his dogs. He recorded having won awards with seventeen different cockers and having exported dogs to seven different countries. The first dog he ever trained won him his first prize of a silver wine coaster engraved, *Cocker Spaniel Club second in the novice stake at Milton - 1965*. Elizabeth won a Certificate of Merit with the first gundog she trained. James, having a young family and being a housemaster put paid to further trialling, but the cockers continued to pick up regularly on shoots in Somerset. The team were in demand picking up three days a week most weeks through the shooting season, handled by both James and Elizabeth, who sometimes divided forces going to different shoots on the same day.



James loved otterhounds, although he never owned one and, on the cessation of hunting, he became a founder member of the Otterhound Club, with his sister Anne. He judged otterhounds at shows including Crufts. He also had a keen interest in beagles and was secretary of the Beacon Beagles. Whilst judging otterhounds at Honiton Show, he was keen to take the opportunity to watch the beagles in the neighbouring enclosure.

James formed a Lilymere Rat Hunt whilst still at prep school. Using half a dozen of the family's assorted terriers, James hunted and Anne, his sister, was whipper-in. Supporters were charged a subscription and proper meets were held. They hunted around Lilymere and many rats were killed.



In 1965, James became joint master of the Kendal and District Otterhounds, (KDOH). When he moved to Somerset he naturally hunted with local packs. In summer he went out with the Culmstock Otterhounds, often still wearing the distinctive blue coat and grey collar of the KDOH, and in winter he followed the Beacon Beagles. In 1970, James became secretary of the Beacon

Beagles. Although never a regular huntsman, James did, on occasion, step in to hunt both the KDOH and the Beacon Beagles. One day, hunting the KDOH from a meet in Sussex by invitation of the Crowhurst, it was suggested to James that he might like to finish soon as the hounds had been hunting for five hours. James received the news with astonishment; such was his absorption in his hounds he had no idea he had been out for so long.

In 1986, James became chairman of the Culmstock Hunt which, by this time, had become a mink hunting pack, a position he held until the year 2000. He was proud to have been chairman when they celebrated their second centenary. During the 1980s James was also the hunt's conservation officer, representing the Culmstock Hunt on such matters to the Masters and Mink Hound Association.

James joined the Taunton Fly Fishing Club in 1968, becoming chairman in 1993. He was a highly respected chairman for fourteen years. When he decided to give up the chairmanship and 'give someone else a go', the committee were reluctant to lose his guiding influence, consequently deciding to create a new position of president and appointed James accordingly. He continued to give advice to any member who asked him. James was an extremely keen fisherman and, together with Elizabeth, they regularly fished for trout and salmon on the River Tone, Axe and the Taw in Devon and, travelled every year to Scotland. They both braved the cold to fish in Alaska, Russia, Norway and Iceland. Their current house is on a



tributary of the River Tone. When they moved there in 1987, James set up an otter loo to monitor otter signs daily. Elizabeth ran a small trout hatchery on the same stream, until regulations changed preventing this.

If otters had become extinct James would have turned his attention to peregrine falcons. He kept careful records of all his observations. The article *Peregrine at el Rocío* describes three days of watching peregrine behaviour on a tour of Andalusia, led by his good friend Martin Jacoby. It was Martin, a fellow teacher at Taunton School, who introduced James to Dick Treleaven. James would enjoy visiting the Cornish coast to watch peregrines with Dick, it was on one such visit he briefly met Bruce Pearson, who later provided the illustrations for James' first book. James would also visit the Somerset coast to watch peregrines. He was a very keen bird watcher and had recorded seeing over 3,000 species, it was almost always ten times the number of mammals he had seen. He was keen on birds but, 'few were as good as a good mammal'. James was extremely well-travelled and had been birding in Ecuador, Peru, Costa Rica, Alaska, Canada, Israel, Spain, Nepal, Botswana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Russia, Iceland and Norway. James' father had a sparrow hawk and later a merlin. James was a member of the Hawk and Owl Trust.

James first began helping the Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation (the former name of Somerset Wildlife Trust) in 1967, when he started work alongside Ernest Neal at Taunton School. He wrote his first article on otters in Newsletter 14 in 1969; *Otters and Mink-another view*. James had started recording wildlife, and otters in particular, as a child. His regret was that in a fit of 'teenage intellectual arrogance', he threw away these priceless notebooks. He realised his mistake and began them again; his journals and records are a lesson in themselves in meticulous recording, a unique archive of surveys and research.



He was the Otters and Rivers Project officer for Somerset. In October 2013, James received his MBE from Prince William at Buckingham Palace, awarded for conservation of Somerset otters. James was chair of the Somerset Otter Group, a uniquely large group of dedicated otter surveyors, who adopt a stretch of river or stream to survey monthly, and once a year coordinate their efforts on the same weekend to show a county wide snapshot of otter presence.

James built the Somerset Otter Group into its current form with over 100 members. His enthusiasm, charisma and generous heart

enabled him to keep a group of people dedicated enough to survey for a creature some of them will never see, and he has ensured Somerset has the most surveyed and recorded otter population. James has instigated, personally funded and supported numerous research projects ensuring the Group has remained the research group it was initially formed as.

His letters show the depth of concern, involvement and foresight James had in the recovery of the otter in Somerset. Two examples: in 1988 he was corresponding with Philip Wayre expressing his misgivings about the otter release programme and highlighting the dangers of such releases to the Somerset Trust for

Nature Conservation. In 1991, he had picked up on the fact that fish farms were about to need planning permission and had written that this consent should be, *dependent on there being some form of anti-otter device, at least in those areas where there are known to be an increasing number of otters, I believe such a fence is compulsory in at least one of the Scandinavian countries.*



In 2000, James published his first book, *The Otter Among Us*, short listed for the BP Natural World Book Prize. His second book was published in 2010, *The Otter*. James' yearly journals, diaries and copious notes must be the most unique record held in one place about the otter, mammals and birds. His precious Mansergh Cocker Spaniels have the same meticulous records spanning eighty-one years. His talks on the otter always drew large crowds. His last was to the Natural History Museum in London on 8th November 2013, to the London Freshwater Group of the Linnean Society of London. James shared all and any information for the benefit of the otter. He had remarked that he would have liked to study biology at St Andrews University, but the path he took has ensured that the records of his scientific field work will endure forever and be a source of study for many students in the future.



James had a love of music and was on the Forde Abbey Concert Society committee. The only time James was involved in anything musical himself was during his University days. He was forcibly recruited into the Officer Training Corps cadets of St Andrews University. He spoke of HM The Queen giving him £2 a morning to take part in rifle shooting competitions. James calculated that £2 in those days was about nine gallons of petrol, so it enabled him to have access to the countryside and fishing in the evening, in exchange for enjoying himself shooting. He was made a base drummer in the pipe band which had to rehearse often. The base drummer being the conductor of the whole orchestra, James had to be at all the practices. The money this gave him enabled him to spend his summer

holidays looking for otters, bird watching and going fishing. James related this story during one of his interviews on local radio, his choice of music for the programme was bagpipes. He loved a variety of music, Beethoven, Mahler, Haydn, Brahms; if he had any favourites it would be pieces conducted by his cousin Daniel Harding.

James' last year was a very special one; in June he was not only awarded the MBE in the Queen's birthday honours, but he became a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London, the world's oldest extant biological society which remains a leading modern forum for debate and discussion of natural history. This meant as much to James as the MBE he received at Buckingham Palace on 17th October 2013. On 24th October, having given a talk on otters and met up with friends at the Devon Mammal Group, he had expressed surprise that so many people had been genuinely pleased for him.

Lucy Mead, with contributions from Michelle Werrett, Elizabeth Williams, Anne Roslin Williams and Robert Williams

British Association for Shooting and Conservation

The Stanley Duncan Conservation Trophy



James Williams was awarded this prestigious Honour by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC). Nominations are made in secret, so James was unaware that he had been proposed by Robin Marshall-Ball and James Green. With James' death in February 2014, the BASC took the unprecedented decision to award the Trophy posthumously.

On 14th June 2014, Elizabeth and Rob Williams, were guests of the BASC, at their annual general meeting. Elizabeth received the Trophy from their President Lord Home.

Citation

The Stanley Duncan Conservation Trophy is awarded to an affiliated club, member or individual who, in the opinion of Council, has contributed most to conservation in the preceding twelve months.

For many years until his death in February 2014 James was the chairman of the Somerset Otter Group. Initial contact was made with Robin Marshall-Ball shortly after he joined BASC in 2002; since then James wholeheartedly supported all his activities with mink and water voles, both on the Somerset Levels and further afield. He was a constant source of detailed information and assistance in all conservation matters, especially concerning riparian habitats and wildlife.

A member of BASC since WAGBI days, (thirty years), James attended and made valuable contributions at mink and water vole workshops on the Somerset Levels organised by Robin and, more recently has done the same for the workshops for the River Tone project for James Green.

Enormously respected throughout the conservation community in the South West, James was awarded an MBE in 2013 for his services to conservation. At all times he ensured that other bodies recognised the contribution the country sports community made to landscape-scale conservation and often made it plain that he had little time for the 'protectionists'!

A skilled salmon fly fisherman, a breeder of his own line in cocker spaniels, and a game shooter, he was an all-round countryman who has given unhesitant and dedicated support to BASC's conservation activities in Somerset.

Until his death he was a valued BASC volunteer on the River Tone project, and his loss will be felt deeply by both the country sports and conservation communities.