



## **Tony Hutson. The Batman.**

It is with great sadness and heavy hearts that we inform you of the death of dear friend and Wildlife Group founder Tony Hutson. He passed away in hospital on Thursday 16th February. We will miss him more than words can express and offer our sincere condolences to his wife Jacqui.

Tony was born in South London in 1944, the son of a banker. He went to school at Henry Thornton Grammar School and soon discovered his interest in Natural History, encouraged by his father. He and a group of friends used to go up to the Natural History Museum where they initially joined a 'junior naturalists club' and then progressed to the seniors. His main interests were birds and mammals, including, of course, bats. Joining the London Natural History Society at the age of 14 was also a major influence.

It is no surprise then, that on leaving school he immediately applied for a job at the Museum, hoping to work with these interests. However, the only job on offer was in entomology. He became responsible for looking after the collections of 80,000 different species of flies. He progressed to looking after collections of insects that live on birds and mammals, including becoming Custodian of the Rothschild Collection of Fleas, all 2000 species of them.

In 1968 he joined a group of scientists sent by the Royal Society on a three-month expedition to Aldabra, a coral atoll in the Indian Ocean. The USA wanted to build an airbase there and the job of the scientists was to see what birds, mammals and insects were living there. There was a small settlement of people living in one corner of the atoll, otherwise it was uninhabited by humans. What they found was astonishing: a population of around 80,000 giant tortoises as opposed to the 3,000 on the Galapagos islands; varieties of birds, many unique to the islands; four species of bats, three of them unique to the island. The Americans were therefore not given permission to build their airbase on such a unique place.

Three years later, Tony was on his way to Diego Garcia, this time on his own. The USA had already started building an airfield on the Western side of the island and many of the indigenous Chagos people had been moved to Mauritius. There remained at that time, about 150 of them living in the Eastern side. Tony spent two months on the island collecting plants and insects before moving on to Mauritius for a further month. He later 'leaked' information of his time on Diego Garcia to human rights groups and in 2000 went to a hearing at the High Court when the Islois (the Chagos people) were pleading repatriation after having been forced off their land by the British so that the Americans could establish their airbase. Tony was later a participant in many wildlife projects around the world, particularly in Africa and Central and South America.

In 1984 Tony left the Natural History Museum to work for the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society to set up a bat conservation programme. It was round this time that Tony and Jacqui moved to Plumpton having bought Winkfield. The bat conservation programme was to encourage the development of local volunteer bat conservation groups, to act as a national voice and co-ordinating centre for these groups. He was also a co-ordinator of a global network of bat specialists concerned for the conservation of the 1200 species of bat. This led to the formation of the Bat Conservation Trust. However, he found there was less fieldwork and more meetings, though he did some travelling to such places as Rwanda and the Maldives. In 1993, he and Jacqui were on a cruise round the Maldives doing a survey of fruit bats and they ended up being shipwrecked, though not seriously as they were only stuck for two days!

Eventually he left the Trust to go freelance thinking he would have more time to work on research and writing. He has several books and research papers to show for it.

He was a Senior Scientific Adviser for UNEP/EUROBATS and compiled an Action Plan for the Conservation of Bats in the UK. This led to him being a founding member of the Sussex Bat Group and playing a crucial role in the Sussex Bat Appeal to save a derelict stable for Greater Horseshoe Bats in West Sussex. This new roost will be a stepping stone to help this rare species return to South East England and be a lasting legacy of his life and bat conservation work.

He was involved with the Plumpton Habitat Survey Group which led to the formation of the Wildlife and Habitat Group which has evolved to become the Plumpton and East Chiltington Wildlife Group of which he was an active and leading member.

We will miss Tony for his extraordinary depth of knowledge, passion for all creatures great and small, and his wonderful sense of humour. He was a very dear friend to all of us.