

# Obituary

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## Jeffery Graham Harrison, OBE, MB, BChir (1922-1978)

Jeffery Harrison's sudden and untimely death on 1st September 1978 came as a thunderbolt particularly to his friends, and to anybody who had come into contact with him—largely because of the tremendously evident vitality of the man. So great was his involvement in so many fields that in no way can words alone fill the gap he leaves: most of us met him in only one facet of his daily lives—lives in the plural, because it always seemed to me (enviously) that in each 24 hours he managed to cram at least three normal days!

*British Birds* readers will remember Jeffery Harrison as wildfowler-naturalist, duck and wader expert, lecturer and writer, blending science and commonsense in a quickfire but easily understood style. His recent book *The Thames Transformed* (1976, written with Peter Grant), illustrated by his wife Pamela's photographs, is an excellent example of his untiring zeal in researching around the main theme, and of his ability to tell a fascinating story forcibly and well. Not so many will know of him as a skilful surgeon and family doctor, a GP in the old-fashioned sense, with a wide following in and around Sevenoaks ever seeking his friendly advice and counsel, and not just on medical matters. In the background, too, he was a businessman, involved in the family shipping interests. In everything he did, never was there a rest between enterprises.

Jeff was the essential link between wildfowling and conservation; and here we may miss him most severely, as none could try to equal him in both fields. He had a vast store of knowledge of duck and wader numbers, migrations and distributions, and travelled the world with his photographer-wife Pamela in pursuit of his interests. The result was not just an enrichment of his personal knowledge, because the two of them, in enormously popular lectures, shared their enjoyment and interest with thousands of listeners.

The Harrisons are a close-knit family—and the Harrison Trust will serve as a memorial to Jeff as it does to his father, Dr James Harrison. Dr James was involved in the early parry and riposte of the 'Hastings Rarities' in *British Birds* and elsewhere; at the time of his death, Jeffery was about to complete a book on the subject which will be published posthumously. Jeffery was also part of the editorial team of a new *Birds of Kent*, which will be dedicated on publication to him and to Dick Homes, another of the editors who also died in 1978 (*Brit. Birds* 71: 532-534).

Surely Jeffery's greatest memorial will be the reserve he constructed from scratch at gravel pits excavated on the outskirts of Sevenoaks. He, his family and friends created there a tremendously rich area for birds, basically from very little. Here was Jeff at his most enthusiastic: a one-man conservation dynamo, bubbling over with ideas, galvanising others



26. Dr Jeffery Harrison (1922-1978) with his wife Dr Pamela Harrison (*Guy Harrison*)

to work in cold mud and water in all weathers, landscaping, planting appropriate wildfowl food plants, adding hundreds—if not thousands—of trees for shelter, Siskin- and Redpoll-fodder, and beauty. Here he functioned as ecological engineer, reserve warden, and navy all at the same time; and, in his lifetime, the alders reached 10 m and he saw the reserve attract, among the routine hordes of duck, some of those ‘cream’ birds that keep us all enthused: Ospreys, egrets—even Dalmatian Pelican! And he found time to run a successful Snipe-ringing programme, netting over specially constructed areas of the reserve. The Sevenoaks reserve lay behind his creation as an OBE for services to conservation, and is now a world-famous example of not just what-to-do but that it can be done, and most successfully.

On the day he died, Jeffery was out early (and that meant *early*) with his family under the wide skies over the islands in the south Medway. It is fitting that his last field trip should have been to an area that he knew and loved so well, and did so much both to understand and to protect for those of us who remain to enjoy. Knowingly or not, we shall all miss this man. To Pamela, Guy and Judy we extend our warmest sympathy.

JIM FLEGG