

ELIZABETH ANNE PLATTS (1937–2017)

Elizabeth Platts, who was a long-standing member of the Conchological Society and a member of its Publications Committee and Council, died in Winchester on 18th May, aged 79. Elizabeth Anne Platts was born on 16th December 1937 in London, the daughter of Paul and Doris Williams. For most of her childhood and early life she was called Lilla, the name recently given to her granddaughter. She went to school in Putney and studied a wide range of subjects including French, Latin and Art, before focusing on science for her A-levels. Biology was always her favourite subject, which stemmed from her childhood interest in various aspects of natural history. At the University of Nottingham she developed a particular interest in marine biology and molluscs, especially nudibranch sea slugs. She became heavily involved with various activities at Nottingham, becoming Secretary and then President of the University Biological Society and Vice President of the University Mountaineering Club. She participated in biological expeditions to the Alpes Maritimes and on a pharmaceutical expedition to Spitzbergen, where she volunteered to have her normal diurnal rhythms temporarily reversed as part of a pioneering study. She had embarked on a Joint Honours BSc course in Botany and Zoology, with subsidiary Chemistry and Microbiology, but was unable to complete the degree because of an undiagnosed thyroid condition, which was finally treated in 1964.

After leaving university, she taught for several years at various schools in London. She married her husband Richard and in 1965 they had their first daughter Victoria. Richard did not share Elizabeth's intense interest in natural history but he was a gifted amateur photographer who was able to photograph many of her beloved sea slugs. Many of these photographs were eventually archived in the Ulster Museum and at the Natural History Museum in London. In 1970, the family moved to Belfast where Richard had taken up a post in the Economics Department of Queen's University. She continued to teach Biology at different schools in Belfast until her second daughter, Sarah, was born in 1981. Once established in Belfast, Elizabeth quickly became engaged with the natural history community in Ireland. She joined the Belfast Naturalists' Field



Club and became closely involved with the Botany and Zoology Department of the Ulster Museum, where she subsequently became an honorary member of staff. She produced the first checklist of marine Mollusca for Sea Area 28 (Belfast) for the Conchological Society's Marine Recording Scheme and became the Society's Marine Recorder for Sea Areas 33 and 34 (Donegal). She also produced *An Annotated Checklist of North Atlantic Opisthobranchia* as a tribute to the renowned Danish zoologist Dr Henning Lemche, who had worked in County Galway between 1971 and 1976. She also became a member of the Praeger Committee that administered small grants for fieldwork on behalf of the Royal Irish Academy. In 1976 she succeeded Pat Kertland as Editor of the *Irish Naturalists' Journal*, a position that she held with distinction until 1988, when Richard retired and the family moved back to England. The family lived in Winchester during the 1990s but in 2002 Elizabeth, now divorced, moved to Cambridge, where she formed new friendships and became involved with local societies. During her final few years, as her health worsened, she returned to Winchester to be close to her daughters.

Despite being essentially a marine biologist, it is ironic that perhaps her best-known work relates to two terrestrial species. The first concerns her work with Martin Speight that sought to clarify the taxonomic status and geographical distribution of the Kerry slug *Geomalacus maculosus* throughout its European range. The second, and perhaps her best-known work, relates to her

discovery in 1976 of a thriving population of the land winkle *Pomatias elegans* at a site on the Burren in County Clare. She co-authored several papers about the significance of this discovery and subsequently wrote an MPhil thesis (University of Southampton) about this colony, which remains the only living population of this species known in Ireland. The period when the Platts family lived in Northern Ireland coincided with one of the most troubled episodes of that region's history. She was very matter-of-fact about the difficulties arising from the political turmoil but she loved her time there and the people whom she met, and looked back on it with great affection.

Elizabeth belonged to several other learned societies and played an active role in their work. She was also a long-standing member of the Malacological Society of London, serving two terms as Vice President (1990–1993 and 1996–2000), and nearly 10 years as Treasurer (2000–2009). She had recently been made an Honorary Life Member of that Society. Since 1980 she was a member of *Unitas Malacologia*, and helped that organization to produce a marine molluscan database for the North Atlantic and Mediterranean (CLEMAM). Her membership of other societies and associations not yet mentioned included the Linnean Society (from 1975), Society for the History of Natural History (from 1976), Jeffrey's Association (1977–1982), Ray Society (from 1993) and a member (later succeeding Max Walters as Chair) of the Editorial Board of *Nature in Cambridgeshire* (2003–2015). She served on the Council of the Ray Society (founded in 1844) and during the period 2010–2013 was elected its first female President, another accolade that gave her particular delight.

Her main influence, however, was not through her research or written work but as the result of the way that she actively encouraged others. Through her membership of all these societies (the list is certainly not comprehensive) she had formed a useful network of contacts and she was always keen to introduce people from these different spheres. It is no coincidence that several of these societies have now held joint meetings, nor that members of the Malacological Society and Board Members of *Nature in Cambridgeshire* have recently published Ray Society monographs. She was also instrumental in championing the exquisite botanical artwork of the late Raymond Piper, a family friend from Ireland, who was eventually

persuaded to exhibit at the Botanical Society of the British Isles, the Linnean Society and the Royal Horticultural Society, where in recognition of the quality of his work he was awarded the Linley Medal in 1975. Elizabeth was a great facilitator and problem-solver and really quite an inspirational person with a wonderful sense of fun. Throughout her life, Elizabeth suffered from a whole series of auto-immune problems and she never really enjoyed 'good health'. However, for most of her life her health problems seemed to have been more of a spur than an impediment and she never let them interfere with her plans to travel (for example, to Hong Kong, Thailand, Burma and Sri Lanka) or undertake other activities. She was always smiling and keen to become involved with whatever activity was at hand. It was typical of her to nominate the Conchological Society as one of her chosen charities at her funeral.

Richard C. Preece

PUBLICATIONS (IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)

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- PLATTS E 1974 *Alderia modesta* (Lovén) and *Limopontia depressa* Alder and Hancock in Down and Antrim; the latter species new to Ireland. *Irish Naturalists' Journal* **18**: 123.
- PLATTS E 1977 The land winkle *Pomatias elegans* (Müller) confirmed as an Irish species. *Irish Naturalists' Journal* **19**: 10–12.
- PLATTS E 1978 The first record of the copepod *Doridicola agilis* Leydig on the nudibranch *Aeolidiella sanguinea* (Norman). *Irish Naturalists' Journal* **19**: 252.
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- PLATTS E & PREECE RC 2009 Stella Madeline Davies, 1927– 2008 [Obituary]. *Journal of Conchology* **40**: 111–112.

