

R. S. R. Fitter 1913-2005

C R Lambrick

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Richard Fitter on Pixey Mead at the Meadow Dandelions weekend in May 1999. Photo – Frances Watkins

Primarily a bird enthusiast, Richard's first memory was watching ducks from his pram at Tooting Bec Common. He rapidly abandoned egg collecting in favour of recording in copious notebooks. His father was in business, so Richard trained as an economist at the LSE and worked initially in the Institute of Political and Economic Planning, developing an ability to make complex matters clear and comprehensible. After the outbreak of war he moved to Mass Observation and then to the Operational Research Section of Coastal Command, but did not lose his passion for wildlife. His *London's Natural History* (1945), one of the first of Collin's New Naturalist series, was welcomed by the war weary public and sold 40,000 copies. In 1945 his *Pocket Guide to British Birds* broke tradition to arrange the species by size and habitat – it sold

100,000 copies. A makeover for plants (doing them by colour) came in 1956 with *The Pocket Guide to Wild Flowers*, co-authored with David McClintock.

The reforming post-war government recognized the imperative of conservation and Richard became secretary of the Wildlife Conservation Special Committee, personally assessing many of the sites to be put forward as National Nature Reserves. In 1946 Richard moved with his family to Burford where he was assistant editor of *The Countryman* for 13 years. Moving to Chinnor in 1953, he bought land later donated to the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Naturalists' (now Wildlife) Trust (BBONT), of which he was one of the most active founders, serving in many capacities including its Scientific Policy Committee and setting up its Rare Species Group in 1988. He became Hon. Sec. of the Fauna Preservation Society, now Fauna and Flora International, while his wife edited its magazine *Oryx*. His conservation work extended from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature to Falklands Conservation and the Galapagos Conservation Trust. He continued his prolific writing, which included dictionaries, history, biography and study of the natural world; he was even active on a flora of France when he died.

An ardent field naturalist, Richard searched for and refound Ted Lousley's secret location of the military orchid in the Chilterns and going out to look for Pasqueflower at Aston Upthorpe he spotted an alpine swift! Both these sites he was able to bring into management by BBONT. He kept detailed records including many on the first flowering of plants, showing the effects of global warming. Richard was very helpful to the fledgling Rare Plants Group of the ANHSO, attending one of the planning meetings in December 1993. He regularly helped us search for species and identify them and spoke on his involvement with many endangered plants.

Always keen for new life he came to Pixey Mead in 1999 to look for a microspecies of dandelion (see photo), and in the spring of 2005 urged the Rare Plants Group to look for and look after the rare blue fescue grass at Frilford. Richard carried his encyclopaedic knowledge lightly, and shared it eagerly with all who would listen to him, or read his books.

**Camilla Lambrick, Picketts Heath, Ridgeway, Boars Hill,
Oxford, OX1 5EZ
camillalambrick@btinternet.com**