

Obituary: Graeme Talbot Smith (February 1938 – June 1999)

GRAEME TALBOT SMITH was born in Adelaide on the 10th of February 1938 and died on the 30th of June in Perth, aged 61. Ironically, he was informed that he had pancreatic cancer on his 61st birthday. From his diagnosis to his untimely death, Graeme fought a tough, but unwinnable, battle against the cancer. What struck all those who saw him during this period was his calm acceptance of his terminal condition and the equanimity he displayed throughout his illness.

After school in Melbourne, Graeme majored in Zoology and Geology at Melbourne University, working in Kalgoorlie during one of his university breaks. His first published paper was a note on a bat mandible found in a cave in Victoria [1964 *Vic. Nat.* 81: 78-79]. In 1964 he studied the ecology of *Urodacus abruptus*, a species of scorpion, for his Honours in Zoology at the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra. His second scientific paper was on *Urodacus abruptus* [1966 *Australian Journal of Zoology* 14: 383-398]. This started a love of scorpions that continued throughout his working life and much of his spare time. Wherever he went he collected scorpions, measured burrows and went on night expeditions with an ultraviolet light to census scorpions. They fluoresce under UV light as his wife Helen well remembers, having chased escaped members of the captive colony he kept at home. Graeme delighted in taking people on his scorpion hunting expeditions, waxing lyrical on the wonders of the world of scorpions. He was planning to write a book on scorpions, however, he ran out of time.

In 1965, Graeme joined the Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition and spent 2 seasons (1966 and 1967) on Macquarie Island where he worked on the Royal Penguin *Eudyptes chrysolophus*, studying for a PhD at ANU [1970 *Studies on the behaviour and reproduction of the Royal Penguin Eudyptes chrysolophus schlegeli*. PhD thesis Australian National University].

Graeme was appointed to CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research in Western Australia in February 1970 to work on the Noisy Scrub-bird *Atrichornis clamosus* [1981 *Biol. Conserv.* 19: 239-254]. This research formed the basis of much of the Department of Conservation and Land Management's successful recovery program for this species [1996 *Wildlife Management Program 12*, Department of Conservation and Land Management].

During this period he also worked on the endangered Western Whipbird *Psophodes nigrogularis* and Western Bristlebird *Dasyornis longirostris* [1985 in J Ford's edited volume on *Fire Ecology and Management in Western Australian Ecosystems*, pp 95-102]. He then worked on corellas as part of a research group studying the ecology of cockatoos with Ian Rowley and Denis Saunders [1982 *Aust. Wildl. Res.* 9: 541-556; 1986 *Aust. Wildl. Res.* 13: 275-85; 1991 *Wildl. Res.* 18: 91-110; 1992 *Emu* 92: 19-27], then on small animals in the Kellerberrin area, forming a productive relationship with Max Abensperg-Traun [1996 *Journal of Applied Ecology* 33: 1302-1310].

A superb natural historian and an enthusiastic teacher, Graeme was very well read and knowledgeable on a wide range of subjects. The following story illustrates this point. One morning while on holiday on Rottne Island, Graeme and DAS were scanning birds on Government House Lake. DAS saw 2 birds among a raft of banded stilts and asked Graeme "what are those 2 birds, with the pointed bills, spinning around like tops among the banded stilts?" Graeme looked at them and said "they're phalaropes if ever I saw them." DAS said "have you ever seen any?" and he replied "no, but that's what they would be if ever I saw them." He then described the characteristics of phalaropes from memory of something he had been reading. This incident resulted in a paper by Graeme on the red-necked phalarope in southwestern WA [1980 *West. Aust. Nat.* 14: 237-8.]

Graeme retired from CSIRO on the 9th of February 1993, but continued as an active Research Fellow and member of the Western Australian CSIRO research group until shortly before his death. In this capacity he worked with Terri Lloyd and the Dongerlocking Landcare Group near Dumbleyung. His last published paper was on the ecology of a scorpion *Urodacus armatus* [1998 *Pacific Conservation Biology* 4: 209-214]; this was his seventy-sixth publication.

Graeme is survived by his wife Helen and his daughters Katy and Lizzie. He will also be missed by his many friends and colleagues who enjoyed his breadth of knowledge, his cheerfulness and his generosity in helping others.

Denis A Saunders & Ian Rowley