

# PHIL HOCKEY

8 March 1956 – 24 January 2013

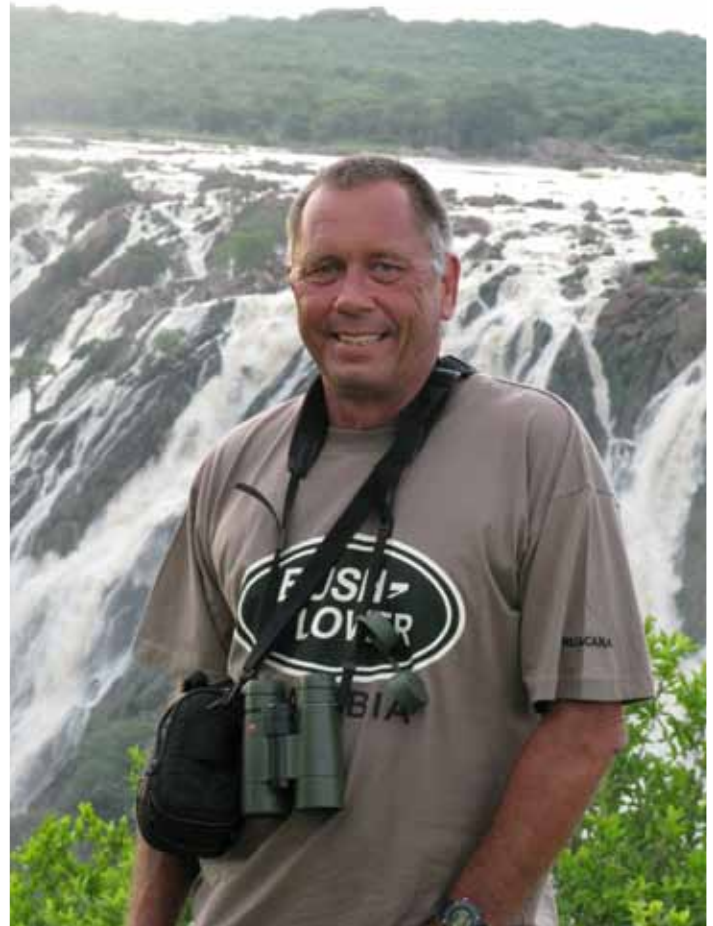
**PHIL HOCKEY WAS BORN** in England and obtained his BSc honours degree from Edinburgh University in 1977. He initially came to the Percy FitzPatrick Institute in 1976 to assist with a study of White-fronted Plover breeding biology at Langebaan Lagoon. Preferring conditions here to counting sea ducks in winter from freezing Scottish shores, Phil moved to South Africa in 1979 to study African Oystercatchers for his PhD. In addition to performing a detailed study of this fascinating species, Phil also stimulated work on rocky shore intertidal communities that highlighted the importance of guano as a source of nutrients in these systems.

After graduating from the University of Cape Town in 1983, Phil stayed on at the FitzPatrick Institute, initially as a contract researcher and then as a lecturer. Although most of his early work focused on coastal and estuarine bird ecology, Phil was involved in setting the guidelines for the first southern African bird atlas at this time, and was lead author on the bird atlas of the south-western Cape. Phil's focus on coastal waders and interactions with their food supplies took him to tropical Africa and islands in the Indian Ocean, South America,

the Canary Islands and the Middle East. His research earned him recognition as the authority on African waders and in 1995 he published the monograph *Waders of Southern Africa*. Together with Ian Sinclair and Warwick Tarboton, he also wrote the best-selling regional field guide *Sasol Birds of Southern Africa*.

As Phil's career developed, he broadened his fields of interest to include the ecology of bird movement and migration, avian life-history evolution, and the ecology of rarity. He also extended his horizons inland, taking charge of the Fitz's Karoo ecosystems project. By the end of the 1990s, Phil was one of the most experienced ornithologists in southern Africa and a natural choice to lead the revision of *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa* as a fully-referenced handbook. This mammoth task took more than five years and was instrumental in bringing a wealth of scientific information to the public domain.

Phil was appointed the FitzPatrick Institute's Director in 2008 and led the DST/NRF Centre of Excellence based at the FitzPatrick Institute to new heights. He initiated a new research thrust, analysing and predicting avian responses to climate change. During his career, he graduated 18 PhD and 33 MSc



SAMANTHA HOCKEY

students, and supervised eight Post-doctoral Fellows and some 30 Honours projects. In addition to more than 120 scientific papers, Phil published over 150 semi-popular articles and 12 books and book chapters. He was passionate about the need to disseminate the science of birds and their conservation to a wide audience, and frequently presented public lectures, radio and television interviews. His contribution in this regard was recognised by the South African Network for Coastal and Oceanic Research who named him 'Marine and Coastal Communicator of the Year' in 2000, and he was awarded the Stevenson-Hamilton Medal by the Zoological Society of

Southern Africa in 2008 for contributions to the public awareness of science.

Phil's impact on and leadership in ornithology has been exemplary and appreciated by a wide range of the ornithological sector. He will be remembered through his vast contribution to the avian literature, both scientific and popular. Phil touched the hearts and lives of many people, from deeply insightful discussions about birds to warm interactions on life itself. He was a deeply caring person with an open heart and will be sorely missed by many. Phil leaves his wife Samantha.

**ROB LITTLE AND PETER RYAN**  
FitzPatrick Institute DST/NRF  
Centre of Excellence, UCT >

# tributes to PHIL HOCKEY

News of Phil's death left many people in the birding world shocked and deeply saddened. These are just a few of the tributes that poured in from his friends, colleagues and students.



SAMANTHA HOCKEY

'Phil was a gifted and passionate ornithologist who leaves a legacy of scientific knowledge, trained ornithologists and conservationists, many books, popular articles and scientific publications, and inspired friends and colleagues. Phil's research and visionary conservation ethos provided invaluable knowledge and tools for conservation. He was a great supporter of BirdLife South Africa, and gave me an amazing amount of personal support. The world will be a much poorer place without him.'

**Mark Anderson, CEO, BirdLife South Africa**

'Phil's talent as a writer was at once huge and prolific. I was awed by his capacity to produce, not only shelves of scientific papers, but also with enviable ease, countless popular articles through which his arcane world was so eloquently and interestingly made accessible to ordinary people like me.'

**Peter Borchert, Publisher, Africa Geographic**

'Phil Hockey, one of the ravens of the academic world: intelligent, influential, sharp, occasionally noisy; usually with a wicked gleam in his eye; unafraid of controversy; swooping, gently, on fools. The roost will be poorer without him.'

**Graeme Cumming, FitzPatrick Institute**

'Phil played a very significant role in my life, both as a mentor and as a friend. His zest for life, the birds, his garden, and a good party, were contagious. The world was richer with him in it. We miss you, Phil. You are loved.'

**Odette Curtis, former MSc student**

'I have no doubt that Phil's name will be included with the giants of ornithology, such as Peter Scott and Roger Tory Peterson. His incredible knowledge of African birds and ability to impart deep-seated enthusiasm through his superb publications and lectures have influenced so many to embrace his impassioned commitment to the conservation of the continent's birds and their habitats. Phil has left an extraordinary legacy.'

**John Hanks, ex-WWF, Peace Parks Foundation**

'I will miss Phil as a complete birding all-rounder: a professional ornithologist, biologist, identification expert, top-notch field birder, avid lister and excitable twitcher. But most of all, I will miss him as a friend.'

**Trevor Hardaker, twitcher and photographer**

'What a corker!' were the words Phil shouted from the hide at Seeberg, many years ago. It was dawn, and we were watching a new bird for southern Africa: the Great Knot. Those are very special words to me. They are synonymous with a love of birds and the pristine world of birds. They are synonymous with a gifted and special man.'

**Vernon Head, Chairman, BirdLife South Africa**

'Although quiet and personal, I loved everything about how Phil influenced my birding and I valued my friendship with him – from showing me the birds of Namibia and unravelling the waders, to meaningful times having a beer together.'

**Rob Little, FitzPatrick Institute**

'Phil Hockey was unique, tough, and passionate. He understood the trade-offs of life better than anyone. His passion for birds, science, female post-grads, booze, cigarettes, parties, a good hypothesis, and the Kalahari, was breathtaking. Cheers, *boet*, you end an era.'

**Barry Lovegrove, Zoology, University of KwaZulu-Natal**

'One of the giants of South African ornithology, who leaves a rich legacy of contributions to science, conservation and birding. Your intellect was inspirational, your enthusiasm infectious, and your sense of humour unforgettable. It was a privilege working with you.'

**Andrew McKechnie, University of Pretoria**

'I worked with Phil for close on 20 years as author and consultant, but also knew him as a good friend. Phil was an accomplished writer, expert in his field, and one of our most highly valued authors, generous with his knowledge and expertise and always ready to advise and help. He will be sorely missed.'

**Pippa Parker, Random Struik Natural History Publishers**

'The Percy FitzPatrick Institute is one of UCT's two DST/NRF Centres of Excellence, and Professor Hockey, its Director, was one of those who make it the powerhouse of important science that it is. Phil was a much-loved member of UCT. To birders, Phil is known for a great field guide and as the chief scientific editor of *Roberts VII*, which, if not a field guide, is certainly magisterial. To the thousands of students who have passed through his classes, he was a guru, kind father figure, field supervisor and teacher.'

**Max Price, Vice Chancellor, UCT**

'Phil and I have been friends for 40 years. We studied ecology together at Edinburgh University, forming a cohort of friends that remain in

touch to this day. Apart from his incredible academic, birding and publishing credentials, Phil was a wonderful human being. He was fun, caring, sensitive and kind – a man of huge heart, fine mind and great character. We miss you Phil.'

**Karen Ross, Maun, Botswana**

'Phil and I had a friendly birding rivalry stretching back more than 30 years. I'll miss his keen insights and encyclopaedic knowledge. His passing has left a gaping hole in the heart of the Fitz and in the lives of the many people fortunate enough to know him.'

**Peter Ryan, FitzPatrick Institute**

'I could not have wished for a better person to have filled the role of Director of the Percy FitzPatrick Institute than Phil. Very sad, Phil had so much more to offer.'

**Roy Siegfried, former Director, FitzPatrick Institute**

'Phil was my friend, colleague and birding buddy for over 30 years. As well as being a first-class scientist

he was one of the best field birders in Africa and is one of Africa's ornithological giants. He had only just started his real passion, serious twitching in Central and West Africa. I will miss him on field trips, especially his sense of humour and endless hours of daft limericks.'

**Ian Sinclair, birder, author**

'Thanks, Phil, for showing me new places and new birds, astounding me with your endless knowledge, sharing great moments. For early mornings, late nights, serious science and frivolous joking. You've wonderfully benefited so many lives. What a pleasure it's been.'

**Vanessa Stephen, former Conservation Biology student**

'Phil will be remembered for many things, but for me his enduring legacy to birds has been his oystercatcher work. Phil has inspired generations of students, conservationists, lay-public and even the 'oyk-nannies' who look after the nesting oystercatchers on our beaches, to make this iconic South

African bird one of the world's most intimately known waders. Farewell my friend.'

**Warwick Tarboton, birder, photographer, author**

'Phil Hockey was a mentor, ornithological guru and exceptional strategist, qualities that will leave an indelible legacy. His ecological acumen, mastery of multiple disciplines and brilliant scientific mind combined with a passion for birding to produce one of our greatest birders, scientists and leading lights in ornithology. But his passion, ability to teach, and life lived full and rich are what I will miss most.'

**Ross Wanless, BirdLife South Africa, former PhD student**

'Thank you for unlocking Namibia's secrets for me, many hours spent around campfires, sharing laughter, limericks and oysters. On my life list of friends you were the mega! Go on the wings of angels, old friend. Thank you for all the gifts.'

**Colin Wylie, touring in Namibia**



AFRICAN OYSTERCATCHER JESSIE WALTON