

OBITUARY

Robin Chancellor*** 24 October 1921 – † 27 October 2010**

Robert (Robin) Duff Chancellor died on 27 October 2010 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, after a short illness. He was aged 89. He had a Buddhist funeral in Chiang Mai on 2 November 2010. His ashes will be returned to England for burial in the churchyard at Stoke Bruerne, the village near Stoke Park in Northamptonshire where he lived for many years in a large 'listed' country house, passed to his nephew about ten years ago. He purchased two derelict 1630 Inigo Jones pavilions in 1954 and restored them. He lived in one of the pavilions, a former chapel, the main house having been destroyed by fire in 1886.

Robin was born in London on 24 October 1921 and was educated at Eton and Trinity College Cambridge. He was the son of Lt-Col Sir John Robert Chancellor, sometime head of that Scots family of Shieldhill, Lanarkshire, and Mary Elisabeth Howard (daughter of George Rodie Thompson of that family of Nunwick Hall, near Penrith in Cumbria). The house in which his father lived had been in the Chancellor family since the 15th century. Robin's brother was Sir Christopher Chancellor, for many years managing director of Reuters News Agency, who was knighted in 1951.

His father's diplomatic posts included the appointments of First Governor of the Self-Governing Colony of Southern Rhodesia (1923–1928) and High Commissioner and Commander in Chief for Palestine and Transjordan (1928–1931). Robin's youth was spent in these former colonies from which his love for warm climates undoubtedly derived. He detested the English winters. Recollecting his past, he liked recounting an anecdote. During a visit to Israel he studied the former Governor's palace from all angles and was finally asked by a policeman what he was up to. He replied dryly "I spent part of my youth in these buildings – my father was the Governor of Palestine." He was then invited inside and allowed to look around. It was in Jerusalem, at eight years old, that he contracted measles, causing his eyesight to be permanently damaged.

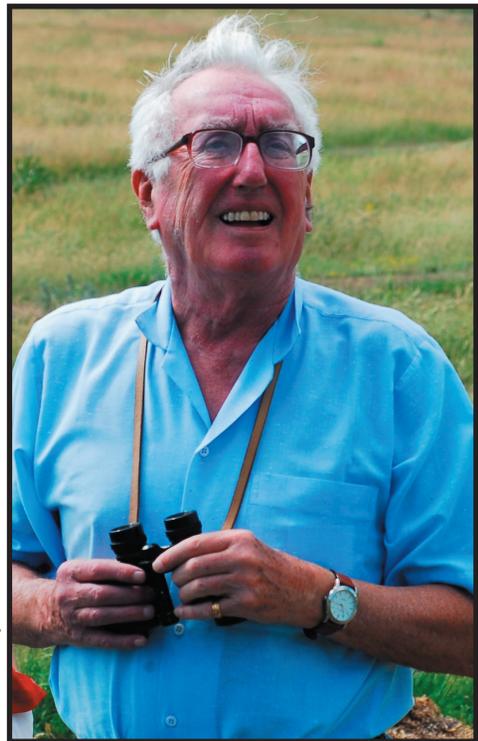
Robin followed a career as a publisher (mainly art facsimiles), but after retirement, was able to devote himself full time to bird conservation, another of his passions. His extreme short-sightedness prevented him from being an active field ornithologist so that he channelled his entire

energies into administrative bird conservation tasks and the editing of ornithological publications

Robin was appointed Assistant Honorary Secretary of ICBP in March 1974, whilst Phyllis Barclay-Smith continued as Honorary Secretary. They worked together in the British Natural History Museum in London. Robin was appointed Honorary Secretary in 1978 when Phyllis retired, and served in this position until 1987. Here he also introduced the first Director of BirdLife International, Dr. Christoph Imboden, to his new tasks and responsibilities.

His special interest was birds of prey and he busied himself with the publication of the proceedings of international raptor conferences. He was entrusted by ICBP and subsequently BirdLife International with the editing of the first two volumes of the Vienna (1975) and Thessalonica (1982) world conferences.

From 1982 until shortly before his death Robin was Hon. Secretary and Treasurer of the World Working Group on Birds of Prey and Owls (WWGBP). In this role he was editor or co-editor of all further six comprehensive conference volumes published by the WWGBP for several bird of prey world conferences and other international



L. Haraszthy

Robin Chancellor
Vértes Mountains, Hungary, May 2007

meetings (*Raptors in the Modern World*, 1989 (3rd World Conference in Eilat), Israel, *Raptor Conservation Today*, 1994 (4th World Conference in Berlin), *Eagle Studies*, 1996 (several eagle conferences), *Holarctic Birds of Prey*, 1998 (International Conference in Badajoz, Spain), *Raptors at Risk*, 2000 (5th World Conference in Midrand, South Africa) and *Raptors Worldwide*, 2004 (6th World Conference in Budapest, Hungary).

This time-consuming occupation – the proceedings published from 1989 to 2004 alone comprised altogether more than 4,400 pages, in addition to other bird of prey volumes – remain his most significant ornithological legacy. The volumes contained original work only, and are still extensively cited. He had to substantially rewrite a great part of most of the articles because English was not the mother tongue of many authors – an immense task, but one which he set about with relish. He had a great command of English, and excelled at reducing a mass of impenetrable verbiage into a few simple sentences. Reading French and German easily he also translated many papers from these languages into English. While working on manuscripts, he smoked more or less non-stop, and battered out the revised texts on an ancient typewriter. During 1996–2001, Robin was an Editorial Board Member of the journal *Buteo*, a specialist raptor publication of the Czech and Slovak Working Groups on Protection and Research on Birds of Prey and Owls. During 2007–2010, he continued as a Board Member of the *Slovak Raptor Journal*, published by Raptor Protection of Slovakia.

Robin was very attracted to Hungary, which he frequently visited and where he had some very close friends (Dénes Jánossy, Andor Taba, József Fidlóczky, László Haraszthy, György Kállay, János Bagyura and Tamás Péchy). He was an honorary member of the Hungarian Ornithological and Nature Conservation Society (MME) (*BirdLife Hungary*) since 1982. He supported financially a conservation project on the *Meadow Viper*; about which he was interviewed by Hungarian television in Thailand shortly before his death.

Robin possessed at least twelve valuable paintings by József Rippl-Rónai, a painter of the late Impressionism and Symbolism schools, who was a forerunner of modern painting in Hungary. He inherited them in 1973 from a journalist and art collector, András Révai, a Hungarian emigrant living in London. One of these paintings, presented by Robin to the MME, was taken to Budapest by the Art historian Tamás Kiesebach. Hungarian nature conservation projects were funded from the proceeds of the sale. One of these projects was the purchase of a house for a *Meadow Viper* conservation station. In addition the *Somogyfajsz Meadows* (more than 10 hectares) in the *Boronka* nature reserve were acquired. Finally a house in *Tömörd* in western Hungary was bought and furnished and equipped as an ornithological field station.

He spent a lot of time in Africa with Leslie Brown, who described Robin as one of the few people he could stand to be with for more than a few days at a time. After Leslie's death he accompanied several WWGBP members (Bernd Meyburg, Jean-Marc Thiollay, Bas van Baalen and Joachim Matthes) on several bird of prey research expeditions to Latvia, Turkey, Zambia, South Africa, Namibia and Indonesia. Despite his already advanced age, he demonstrated his remarkable resistance to heat and exertion. He spent the last few years of his life predominantly in Thailand.

Robin was a low-profile lovable individual who did not seek fame or recognition. Yet he was tremendously good company, full of joyful anecdotes about influential people he had known and travelled with. He was always friendly, helpful and patient, but with firm views on some of the less amiable members of the raptor community with whom he had to interact. It will be exceptionally difficult to replace him as editor of raptor proceedings. In remembrance of Robin WWGBP has started to digitise the bird of prey volumes and to provide them free of charge for all interested persons on the WWGBP website; indeed, *Eagle Studies* and *Holarctic Birds of Prey* are already available.

Bernd Meyburg & Ian Newton