

The History of the Wildlife Sound Recording Society

By Richard Margoschis

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THE HISTORY OF THE SOCIETY.

by Richard Margoschis.

PRELUDES.

Thursday May 16th 1967 was a warm sunny afternoon; Roger Burrows and I were sitting near to the old mansion in the valley at Woodchester Park Field Centre, near Nailsworth, Gloucestershire; a common whitethroat sang alternately from song posts to either wide of us as we talked of certain events during the past three years.

In 1964 the B.B.C. Natural History Unit, in an attempt to discover how many workers were making natural history sound recordings, ran a competition for amateurs and, subsequently, invited those who entered to attend a week-end school at Bristol University during the early weeks of 1965; some twenty people attended. The competition had been organised by John Burton who had recently been appointed Organiser, Natural History Sound Recordings, at B.B.C., Bristol; at this time Roger Burrows was Staff Tutor with with Extra-Mural Department of Bristol University; Burton and Burrows joined forces to organise the week-end school, the success of which brought forth requests for a week-end 'in the field'. Roger Burrows already had contact with Reg Kolly who was running Woodchester Park Field Centre as a private venture, and was able to arrange a week-end there in June, 1965; virtually the same people attended and there was no doubt of its success.

From this second gathering came two requests; that further week-ends should be arranged; and that an organisation should be formed to bind together all those, both amateur and professional, interested in this work. The nucleus of an organisation was there, all that was required was for somebody to take the initiative but, as is so frequently the case with such things, time went by with nothing done. To my knowledge, however, a considerable amount of correspondence passed between Roger Burrows, myself, and Jack Skeel. Roger was unable to arrange a meeting in 1966 and so two years slipped by before we (Roger and I) met again in 1967. Perhaps Roger was a little too optimistic because, instead of a week-end course, he arranged a week-long course, again at Woodchester Park Field Centre. Unhappily, it failed to obtain the necessary support and Roger had to cancel the lectures he had arranged. Nevertheless, he suggested that those who wished should attend at the Field Centre and he would spend what time he could with them - and Reg Kolly was good enough to go along with this. The three of us who went, Bill Smith, Eric Levett and myself, had a wonderful week.

So it was that the history of the W.S.R.S. commenced that Thursday afternoon in May, 1967, as Roger and I talked, because we decided that we would do something about the desired organisation; he agreed to produce a Newsletter and I agreed to produce and circulate a tape. The first Newsletter - a single sheet - appeared early in January, 1968, it listed twenty-two people known to be interested and invited all to attend a meeting at Woodchester Park Field Centre on March 29th/31st., when proper consideration would be given to the formation of a suitable organisation.

Meanwhile, I had been in touch with the same people asking for recordings with which to make up a programme for circulation; the first tape started circulation in January, 1968, and contained material sent to me by the following eleven people:-

Magnus Sinclair, Jack Skeel, David Taylor, Janet Williams, George Baker, Tony Field, John Hooper, Norman Wylie-Moor, Richard Margoschis, John Burton and Victor Lewis.

Both the Newsletter and the Circulating Tape were sent to the B.B.C. Natural History Unit at Bristol where, in 1968, John Sparks was producing 'WILDLIFE REVIEW' as a regular nature programme and he invited me to talk about the proposed new organisation. The timing of the broadcast was first class; it went out first on Sunday, March 24th, a week before the inaugural meeting, and was repeated on the following Wednesday morning; the results were almost staggering and indicated that there might well be more interest than we had imagined. By mid-day on the Wednesday I had received, and accepted, an invitation to take part in a Midland T.V. News programme broadcast by I.T.V., and by that evening my wife, Vivien, was receiving telephone enquiries from all over the country. This wonderful publicity was supplemented the following week-end when Roger Burrows took part in a Radio programme covering the southern part of the country.

THE INAUGURATION.

It was natural that the venue selected for the Inaugural Meeting should be Woodchester Park Field Centre where, on the evening of Friday, March 29th, 1968, some twenty persons gathered, the majority of them having attended the meeting in 1965. The Special Meeting took place during the afternoon of Saturday, March 30th, and it was unanimously agreed that an organisation to be known as The Wildlife Sound Recording Society be formed, its aims being: to promote and encourage, in whatever ways possible, the recording of natural history sounds; and to act as an 'information centre' with regard to field recording techniques and equipment. To fulfil these aims it was decided that a Newsletter, or other publication, should be published about three times a year; that a tape recorded programme should be circulated about three times a year; and that at least two meetings should be arranged each year - one in the spring to be a field meeting and one in autumn to incorporate the Annual General Meeting. The annual subscription was set at 10/- (50p), plus 10/- (50p) enrolment fee, with special provision for family members. Two increases, the last operative from January, 1972, have brought the Annual Subscription to £2 for full membership, enrolment fee and family membership remaining at 50p and 25p respectively.

The Officers elected were:-

Chairman	John Burton
Vice-Chairman	Richard Margoschis
Secretary	Roger Burrows
Treasurer	Vivien Margoschis
Journal Editor	Roger Burrows
Tape Editor	Richard Margoschis

It was decided to invite Dr. Ludwig Koch M.B.E. to be Honorary Life President of the new Society and Desmond Hawkins (B.B.C. Bristol) to be Hon. Vice President; both invitations were accepted. The recent death of Ludwig Koch means that the Society is, at present, without a President.

Persons who attended the Inaugural Meeting were:-

George W. Baker, Colin Brown, Roger Burrows, John Burton, George A. Clark, Roderick Faulkner, Anthony G. Field, John Fisher, John H. D. Hooper, Richard Margoschis, Violet Maxse, Charles O'Gorman, Jack Skeel, Bill Smith, David Taylor and Janet Williams.

Several were accompanied by their wives.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

The first Annual General Meeting was held in the autumn of 1969 when the venue was the British Institute of Recorded Sound in London; it saw the first change in the Officers of the Society. Roger Burrows had moved from Gloucestershire to set up a Field Centre in Cornwall and he found it impossible to devote adequate time to Society demands and, reluctantly, resigned; his place as Secretary and Journal Editor was taken by John Fisher.

In 1970 the A.G.M. was held at Atherstone and, for the first time, a week-end programme was arranged. The meeting was held on the Saturday afternoon in the Council Chamber by kind permission of the Atherstone Rural District Council. Phil Drabble had accepted an invitation to be guest speaker and his address, in which he told of his private reserve at 'Goat Lodge', followed the meeting. Nearly all those present had dinner together at the Old Red Lion and then returned to the Council Chamber to talk among themselves late into the night. The majority stayed overnight and gathered next morning to visit 'Goat Lodge' for a conducted tour by Phil Drabble who rounded the morning off by entertaining all to a sandwich lunch at a local Hostelry. Phil later accepted an invitation to be a Vice-President of the Society.

The trend for future A.G.M.'s had been set and, so far, it has been followed, the venues being:-

1971. Headquarters of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Sandy, Bedfordshire, followed by R.S.P.B. films. On Sunday morning a visit to the Ouse Washes.
1972. Headquarters of The Wildfowl Trust, Slinbridge, Glos., followed by an address by Dr. Janet Kerr, and films. On Sunday morning a conducted tour of the reserve.
1973. Council Chamber, Atherstone Rural District Council, Warwickshire, followed by an Address and Demonstration of recordings by John Kirby (member). On Sunday morning a conducted tour of Alvecote Pools Nature Reserve led by the H n. Warden, George Arnold (member).

Further changes occurred at the 1972 meeting. John Burton retired as Chairman and Richard Margoschis was elected in his place with Ken Haselock as Vice-Chairman. Vivien Margoschis retired as Treasurer and Alex Meldrum was elected in her place. At the 1973 Spring Meeting, mementoes were presented to the retired Officers.

CONSTITUTION AND CODE OF CONDUCT.

A formal Constitution was adopted by the Society at an Extra-Ordinary General Meeting held at Woodchester Park Field Centre on Saturday, May 9th, 1970, and at the 1970 A.G.M. held at Atherstone, a 'Code of Conduct' was adopted. The Code is:-

- (a) do nothing to the detriment of wildlife or its environment and obey legislation on such matters.
- (b) respect the lawful rights of others.
- (c) obey the unwritten law of the countryside.

MEMBERSHIP.

When the Society was formed it was anticipated that membership might gradually grow to around fifty; this view was very quickly shattered by a steady and continuing increase which resulted in membership passing the two-hundred mark in mid-year 1974. Obviously, all who have joined have an interest in natural history and many have a particular interest in bio-acoustics, but members have come, as it were, from two sources - those primarily interested in nature and wanting to record the sounds they hear when in the field, and those primarily interested in recording and turning their skills to nature; the latter are in a considerable minority.

Although membership has been gradually increasing there have been unseen changes taking place; as would be expected, a number of people have, for various reasons, ceased membership of the Society and so new members joining have been greater in number than the actual increase in membership indicates. What is important is that this change has resulted in a greater percentage of members being either actively engaged in making natural history sound recordings or having a scientific interest in which such recordings play an important part.

THE SPRING MEETING.

From 1969 to 1973 inclusive the Spring Meeting was held at Woodchester Park Field Centre in Gloucestershire which, with its wonderful valley adjoining the house, provides facilities for meeting and 'on the spot' recording activities. The 1974 event was held at Cowley Manor, also in Gloucestershire, where members' recording activity was greatly enhanced by the help given by Ray Goodwin (member) in arranging permission to enter upon vast tracts of land.

The scheduled programme has always been sufficiently flexible to allow members adequate time for recording activities and the exchange of views and ideas but, at the

same time, it allows for a Guest Speaker. To date the speakers have been:-

- 1969: John Sparks - Filming for the B.B.C.
- 1970: Victor Lewis (member) - His Recording Activities.
- 1971: Bruce Campbell - Locating bird's nests.
- 1972: Dilys Breese - Producing 'The Living World'
- 1973: John Burton & Dave Tombs - Nature Sounds in Stereo.
- 1974: Pat Whitehouse (member) - Nature in Three
Dimensions.
(Stereoscopic Photography)

Since 1972 a competition, organised by John Fisher, has proved a popular feature at the Spring Meeting. It has been a requirement that recordings entered were made at the meeting venue between 5 p.m. on Friday and 2 p.m. on Sunday. All the entries have been played during Sunday afternoon and the winner decided by all members taking part in the judging. The winners have been:-

- 1972: Alex Meldrum
- 1973: Mora O'Hanlon.
- 1974: Richard Margoschis.

THE JOURNAL. "WILDLIFE SOUND"

From the original four Newsletters, of one to five sheets, the Society's publication has progressed to become a Journal, under the title 'Wildlife Sound', carrying original articles by members and others in addition to general news items, and runs to some sixty pages. Now appearing twice a year it has been produced by typewriter and duplicator, and frequently carries diagrams and details of electrical circuits; the contents have, in fact, reflected the two principal interests - bio-acoustics and the techniques of recording natural sounds on tape. Advertisements from outside sources have been accepted but the limited circulation has tended to attract only a few specialised items.

The first Journal to bear the title 'Wildlife Sound' was edited by Roger Burrows and was published in September 1969; since that date the editorial work has been undertaken by John Fisher. The Journal has always been mailed to all members and copies have been deposited with the British Museum and the British Institute of Recorded Sound; it has now been made available for purchase.

THE CIRCULATING TAPE. "WILDLIFE SOUND"

Since the first circulating tape went out in January, 1968 - before the formation of the Society - it has been issued regularly three times a year; it, also, carries the title 'Wildlife Sound'. Twenty editions have now been issued. One copy of Wildlife Sound No.1 was sufficient to circulate the twenty or so interested persons, but for recent editions it has been necessary to issue twelve copies, eight have been at $7\frac{1}{2}$ i.p.s. and four at $3\frac{3}{4}$ i.p.s. The tapes have made some 1,860 calls at members' homes (78 persons have received all 20 editions), and only two copies have been

completely lost; damaged tapes have also been surprisingly few. Each copy has followed a circuit comprised of about twelve members and, on average, takes about four months to complete circulation. On the whole the system has worked very well though changes of address and extended absences from home have caused problems.

The programmes have been made up, except in a few instances of recordings which members have submitted to the Tape Editor; more recently members have been submitting short, ready prepared, items which have been well received. Recordings have been used to illustrate recording techniques, variations in bird songs and calls, identification of calls etc. etc.

When a recording is submitted to the Tape Editor it is accepted that the member will allow its use in the circulating tape on the strict understanding that it is used for that purpose only and that the tape is circulated only to members. This arrangement, which has existed from the start, still holds, and it has meant that any members using the Society's tape for replay to any other organisation, such as a Natural History Society, Tape Club or School Class, not only breaks an important rule of the Society, but also the copyright of the author of the recording. The tape circulates to the B.B.C. Natural History Unit and has, at times, been featured in 'The Living World'; the B.B.C. is a Corporate member but, because of this rule, the Producer has always sought the permission of the author before using a recording.

Richard Margoschis has been responsible for editing and preparing the circulating tapes, and producing the necessary copies for circulation, since the Society was formed.

LOCAL MEETINGS.

With members of the Society scattered throughout the British Isles it has been difficult - impossible may be a better word - to arrange meetings at a venue which was convenient to all. No local organisation exists but a number of members have arranged meetings, generally at their homes, and so provided an opportunity for members in that area to meet one another - this is encouraged.

SPECIAL PROJECTS.

Four projects have been commenced; the aim is to collect and correlate as many recordings as possible of the species concerned in an attempt to learn something of the vocabulary. Members have been asked to send all suitable recordings to the project leaders with very full documentation. Projects and leaders are:-

Marsh/Willow Tits	Enid Allsopp.
Blackbird	Ken Haselock.
Fox	Richard Margoschis.
Squirrel	John Fisher.

In addition to this work the Society has, on a number of occasions, been able to assist research workers by providing recordings necessary for their work; this is done through the Tape Editor.

SERVICE TO MEMBERS.

Several leaflets have been produced giving guidance and circuits for the construction of pre-amplifiers, filters, etc., they are available from the Secretary for a small fee.

Tape and other accessories have been made available to members at very competitive prices; these are handled by Ray Goodwin.

THE 'SCOTCH' WILDLIFE SOUND RECORDING CONTEST.

Early in 1968 Richard Margoschis was personally approached by a representative of 3M (United Kingdom) Ltd.: his Company was about to launch a tape recording contest and was considering wildlife sound as the subject; he sought the assistance of Richard Margoschis in organising it and in providing a panel of judges. As W.S.R.S. was in the process of being formed, Richard Margoschis considered that its association with such a contest would be a great advantage and so talked the matter over with John Burton (Chairman) and Roger Burrows (Secretary); they agreed.

Assistance was given in drawing up a set of rules and in bringing together a panel of five judges; Richard Margoschis became responsible for receipt of entries and the necessary pre-judging; to draw up a short list for presentation to the judges. After its initial success in 1968, the Society was again approached for assistance and the contest quickly became established; the Society's association with it continued for five years.

However, for the 1972 Contest, the sponsors included a rule that entries must be submitted on 'SCOTCH' tape. As sponsors, the 3M Company had, of course, every right to do this, indeed many wondered why they had not originally included the rule; but a number of members took exception to it and considered that it was unethical for the Society to be associated with a contest which required the use of a specific material. A motion proposed by John Kirby and seconded by John Fisher, was debated at the 1972 A.G.M. and resulted in a decision that the Society should give no assistance to any contest, the rules of which require the use of a specific material. Consequently, the Society is not now associated with the 'SCOTCH' Contest which continues under the sponsorship of 3M United Kingdom Ltd.

The Contest has always been well supported by members of the Society who have continued their support since the break. During the six years in which the Contest has run very few awards have gone to non-members! By virtue of the Society's early association the winning entries, and others, were featured in 'Wildlife Sound' programmes; since then the 3M Company have allowed the continued use of entries in circulating tapes.

THE E.B.U. CONTEST - EUROPEAN CONSERVATION YEAR 1970.

In 1970 the European Broadcasting Union sponsored a wildlife recording contest as a contribution to European

Conservation Year 1970; the contest was organised by the B.B.C. and much of the work fell upon John Burton. Judging was carried out by independent judges in seven European countries and the results speak well for the Society because no fewer than four of the trophies, in the form of nightingales, came to Britain as a result of their entries; they were:-

Overall Winner Gold	Pat Sellar ..	Leach's Petrel.
Bird Class	Silver John Fisher .	Nightingale.
Mammals Class	Silver Richard	
"	"	Margoschis
"	"	Red Fox
..... Bronze	Pat Sellar ..	Norway Lemming.

Winning entries were featured in Wildlife Sound No.11.

THE HELPING HANDS.

The Society, like any other of its nature, had little hope of 'getting off the ground' without a considerable amount of voluntary help in addition to the work carried out by its Hon. Officers. There is no doubt that the assistance given by the B.B.C. Natural History Unit at Bristol, in the early days, was of immense value; we are grateful for that and their continuing interest.

Members' professional and artistic skills have also been put to good use; the motif used on headed notepaper, car badges, etc., was designed by David Taylor and used, also, as the basic design for the Chairman's gavel which was made and presented to the Society by Albert Chapman.

There are other ways in which many members have assisted, but the life of the Society has depended basically, and will continue so to do, upon those members who are actively making natural history sound recordings, supported by those who are in a position to feed in certain vital information. Providing there is a continuing flow of information and articles to the Journal Editor and of recorded material, or details thereof, to the Tape Editor, then the Society, which so far as is known is the only one of its kind, probably in the world, can continue to play an important role in the science of Bio-acoustics.

Editor's Note: Richard would be glad to hear from anybody who thinks that he has missed any important point or made any errors.

