

Gill Memorial Medal Award 2016



SAMANTHA HOCKEY

Phil Hockey was a scientist and ecologist of unusual acumen. Although he chose quality over quantity for research papers, he was nonetheless prolific, supervising more than 50 postgraduate students and writing over 120 research papers and 150 popular articles. He was also a giant in both the birding and the ornithological worlds – two worlds that relatively few people straddle easily – and this status was only enhanced by his irreverent style and wry humour. He contributed insightful suggestions on any topic, and presentations from students and visiting scientists alike were guaranteed to receive incisive questions.

Phil was a dyed-in-the-wool Percy FitzPatrick Institute man. His PhD and entire career were undertaken at the Fitz. He first came to South Africa from the UK in 1976 to assist with a study of breeding White-fronted Plovers at Langebaan Lagoon and then moved here permanently in 1979. He obtained his PhD from the University of Cape Town in 1983 for a study of the ecology of the African Black Oystercatcher. Most of his subsequent work focused on the ecology of coastal and estuarine birds, bird migration, life

Awarded for an outstanding lifetime contribution to the knowledge of southern African birds, the Gill Memorial Medal went this year to the late Professor Phil Hockey.

history evolution and the ecology of rarity. In all of this, he aimed not only to do good science, but to promote good conservation strategies and to predict birds' responses to climate change.

Phil's interest in shorebirds took him to tropical Africa, the Indian Ocean islands, South America, the Canary Islands and the Middle East and he led research expeditions to Chile, the Canaries, Mauritius, the Seychelles, Kenya, Madagascar, the Arabian Gulf and Namibia. His focus on coastal waders and their food supply established him as an authority on these species in Africa; in 1995 he wrote the monograph *Waders of Southern Africa*. By the late 1990s he was recognised as one of the most experienced ornithologists in southern Africa and was asked to be editor-in-chief, along with Richard Dean and Peter Ryan, of *Roberts VII*. He

was also a co-author of the best-selling regional field guide *Sasol Birds of Southern Africa*.

Appointed director of the FitzPatrick Institute in July 2008, Phil led the DST-NRF Centre of Excellence to new heights. He capitalised on the opportunity presented by his new position, using his strategic insight, persuasive personality and unbending determination to secure the renewal of Centre of Excellence status and thereby ensure long-term benefits for bird research, conservation and, of course, the Fitz. During his time there he graduated 33 MSc and 18 PhD students and supervised eight postdoctoral fellows and more than 30 honours projects. The impact of his and his students' research has been disseminated in more than 120 scientific publications.

An advisory member of 17 learned societies, councils and steering committees, Phil was also on the editorial board of the journal *Biological Conservation* and in the international advisory group of the journal *Public Library of Sciences (PLoS)*. He was passionate about the need to disseminate the science and conservation of birds to a wide audience and often gave public lectures and radio and television interviews. In 2000 he was named Marine and Coastal Communicator of the Year and in 2008 he was awarded the Stevenson-Hamilton Medal of the Zoological Society of Southern Africa for contributing to the public awareness of science.

Phil's insights and leadership in ornithology were exemplary and highly valued. He will be remembered not only for his vast contribution to the avian literature, both scientific and popular, but also because he touched the hearts and lives of many through his deeply insightful and good-humoured discussions about birds – and about life.

DR ROB LITTLE, DR ROSS WANLESS & PROF. PETER RYAN



TANIA ANDERSON

Professor Peter Ryan accepts the Gill Memorial Award from Dr Phoebe Barnard on behalf of Samantha Hockey, Phil's wife.