

Obituaries

Peter Francis (1916–2009)

Colonel Peter Francis, Honorary Colonel of the Natal Carbineers, died in the early hours of 15 May. He was 92. As well as being known for his association with the Carbineers, Francis was also a lawyer and long-serving member of the *Witness* board.

Francis was born in 1916 and educated at Michaelhouse and Dundee High School from where he matriculated in 1933. He then studied law at the Natal University College and was admitted as an attorney in March 1939.

His long involvement with the Natal Carbineers began when he joined the volunteer regiment in 1935. During World War 2, Francis served with the Royal Natal Carbineers (as the regiment was known from 1935 to 1962) in the East African, Abyssinian, Libyan and Italian Campaigns. For a brief period he was an aide-de-camp to Field-Marshal Alexander, Commander in Chief of the Middle East Forces.

Francis was the youngest ever officer to command the Carbineers when ap-



Peter Francis

pointed their commanding officer in Italy in October 1944. At 27, he was also the youngest commanding officer in a South African division. During the war, Francis won the Military Cross and was three times mentioned in dispatches.

At the end of the war in Italy, the Carbineers garrisoned the Italian Riviera up to the French border and Francis was appointed Military Commander of the Italian Province of Imperia. During this period he

was invited by the Prince of Monaco to a gala in Monaco and on a subsequent visit met Winston Churchill at the Hotel du Paris where the two men enjoyed a chat over brandy and a cigar.

Francis retired as officer commanding in 1955, but his association with the Carbineers continued. He was appointed an Honorary Colonel of the regiment in 1969. 'The honorary colonel is like the god-father of the regiment,' says Major John Hall, former regimental RSM. 'Colonel Francis was a distinguished man and the custodian of the traditions of the regiment.'

Francis was always a keen supporter of Carbineers history, according to regimental historian Mark Coghlan, author of *Pro Patria: Another 50 Carbineer Years 1945–1995*. 'He made a point of donating all his papers to the Carbineer archive and these were an invaluable addition which greatly informed my work.'

After the war Francis joined Reginald Tomlinson in practice and together they formed the firm, Tomlinson Francis & Company. He became a leading Maritzburg lawyer and was appointed to the boards of a number of local companies.

For many years, Francis was a board member of *The Witness*. 'He was a good friend of my father's,' says Stuart Craib, *The Witness* CEO. 'When we were a small organisation he was very much my father's sounding board.'

Francis was actively involved on the boards of several private schools and became a founding trustee of Cowan House School at the time of its forced relocation from Mountain Rise under apartheid legis-

lation in the early 1960s. He served on the board of St Anne's Diocesan College for 17 years and was chairman for four years. After his retirement to Balgowan in 1975, he sat on the board of Michaelhouse.

Francis was also politically active and was a foundation member of the Progressive Party. He was the party's candidate for Pietermaritzburg District in 1965 and he remained a staunch supporter of the party and its successors all his life.

A keen golfer, Francis was a member of Maritzburg Country Club (now the Victoria Country Club) from the age of 17 until his death. At various times he was its club champion and in later years acted as chairman and thereafter president. He was selected to play for and also captained, the Natal golf team. He later became involved in golf administration and was president of the Natal Golf Union and on the executive of the South African Golf Union. In his mid-80s he recorded two holes-in-one in the space of six weeks. He played his last game at the age of 91.

Francis leaves a wife, Priscilla (whom he married in June 1943 when the Carbineers returned briefly from North Africa), four children, Robin, Elizabeth, Simon and Victoria, and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The funeral took place at the Michaelhouse chapel, Balgowan and he was subsequently interred in the churchyard of St Matthew's Church, Lidgetton, with much military ceremony.

STEPHEN COAN,
courtesy of *The Witness*

Steven Edward Piper (1945–2009)

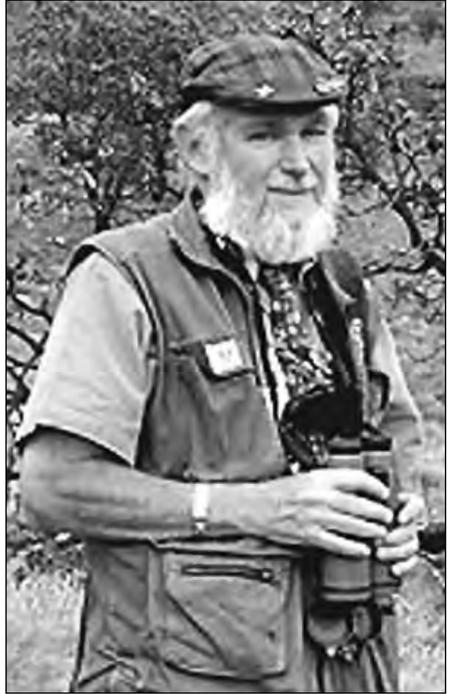
Ornithologist Dr Steven Piper, wagtail and vulture expert, was one of the most respected members of the South African ornithology community who died suddenly just weeks after celebrating his 64th birthday.

Piper was born in Durban on February 28, 1945. He went to school at Westville and Kearsney College and went on to take a B.Sc. in chemical engineering at the then University of Natal, an M.Sc. in applied statistics (awarded *cum laude*) at the University of the Witwatersrand and a Ph.D. in applied mathematics at the University of Cape Town.

Passionate about birds, he pursued his interest in ornithology, both as a pastime and later as a career.

Piper was a renaissance man in the range and diversity of his interests and talents. He held teaching posts at three universities, Natal, Wits and Cape Town, in four faculties, Engineering, Humanities, Science and Social Science, and in seven departments, Applied Mathematics, Botany, Environmental Studies, Mathematical Statistics, Psychology, Surveying and Mapping and Zoology and Entomology. He was appointed as an Associate Professor in Zoology in 1997, was promoted to full professor and retired in 2006, after an extension of his contract. He enjoyed teaching, communicating and interacting with students and took on a heavy load willingly. He taught population ecology with a strong numerical content in addition to courses in evolution and conservation biology. He supervised and co-supervised many postgraduate students in various biological fields.

Piper collected data over 25 years on the breeding biology of Long-tailed Wagtails along the Palmiet River in Westville, which illuminated the long-term demography of



Steven Piper

an African passerine in over 20 publications.

His passion for wagtails was matched or exceeded by that for Griffon Vultures, which were the subject of his doctorate at the University of Cape Town, yielding more than 50 publications. Unsurprisingly, he was asked to contribute the bulk of the vulture and wagtail species texts for the seventh edition of *Roberts Birds of Southern Africa*. He also collaborated with many scientists and wrote papers on frogs, baboons, hyrax, duiker and crabs! He also had papers on geographic information systems, remote sensing, meta-populations, political voting patterns and psycho-linguistics.

Piper worked closely with ornithologists around the globe, recently with Barn Swallow researchers in Europe, and locally at

the Vulture Study Group, BirdLife South Africa and (KwaZulu-) Natal, the Percy FitzPatrick Institute for African ornithology at UCT and colleagues overseas.

In keeping with his love for birds, after he retired from academia Piper invested in a tourism venture that he called Pied Piper Expeditions. The company, based in Underberg, took visitors into the uplands of KwaZulu-Natal, the Drakensberg and into Lesotho via Sani Pass, Ramatseliso's Pass and Qacha's Nek to see the natural wonders of the region, its endemic and special birds, alpine flowers and San rock art.

Professors Mike Perrin and Colleen Downs of UKZN described Piper as 'unique, talented and joyously eccentric.

'He always had a smile and an anecdote. Kind, generous and well informed, he al-

ways had time for students and colleagues alike. He wore a beard, and Scottish cap, covered with many badges collected from conferences around the world, and was instantly recognised and never forgotten.

'Birds were his passion, especially vultures and wagtails, while numeracy and statistics set him apart from many ornithologists and twitchers. He was a charming gentleman and delighted delegates at conferences with wit, humour and science,' they said.

Piper's hugely-attended funeral service was held at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Westville with a subsequent remembrance service at Kenmo Lake in Himeville.

He is survived by his wife Andrea, two children and two grandchildren.

UKZN circular and *The Witness*.

Dr Brian Roy Stuckenberg (1930–2009)

Dr Brian Stuckenberg, who was a distinguished entomologist and Director Emeritus of the Natal Museum, died in February 2009 at the age of 78. He was born and grew up in the Eastern Cape, and at a young age his interest in zoology was encouraged by Dr John Pringle, then director of the Port Elizabeth Museum and Snake Park. He studied at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, and obtained with distinction an MSc degree in entomology. In 1953 he was appointed assistant professional officer at the Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg, where John Pringle was now Director. In 1972 he was awarded a doctorate by the University of Natal, and in 1976 when John Pringle retired Brian Stuckenberg succeeded him as Director at the age of 43.

Shortly after he came to Pietermaritzburg he met and married Pam Usher, then a senior zoology student at the university,

who would later accompany him on many collection trips, assist him in his work in many other ways, and classify the museum's collection of tabanid flies on which she herself became an acknowledged expert.

Brian Stuckenberg had decided to specialise in Diptera – the huge Order of two-winged insects generally called flies – knowing that this was a group that had not been adequately studied and classified, and that it had great significance for agriculture, animal husbandry and other human activities. During his twenty years as head of the Department of Entomology he emerged as the leading dipterist in Africa, and built up one of the largest collections of Afrotropical flies in the world. It has become an invaluable resource for researchers from many countries, and is known as The Brian Stuckenberg Collection. His fieldwork and publications



Brian Stuckenberg

were extensive, and by 1993 more than a hundred taxa had been named after him. Among the previously unknown species he discovered and described was the fossil remains of a bloodsucking fly *Paleoarthrocles mesozoicus* dated at more than 175 million years, which pushed back the age of the oldest known dipteran fossil record by over 100 million years. The quality of his research was later given international recognition by his being made an honorary member of the International Congress of Dipterology – at the time only the fourth person ever to be honoured in this way.

He believed passionately in the educational role of museums, especially in communities where the school system was inadequate, and under his leadership the institution's education department became a unit that not only welcomed increasing numbers of children to the museum, but actively took the services of the museum out into the community, and especially to the deprived areas around Pietermaritzburg. The Natal Museum was increasingly seen not as an alien and perhaps even intimidating place, but as one where ordinary people, children and

adults, could be comfortable and even feel a sense of ownership. In 1990 Stuckenberg visited museums in the United States, mainly those that excelled in presenting science and technology to children, and what he saw resulted in innovations and new directions at the Natal Museum.

His editorship of the *Annals of the Natal Museum*, several months as Acting Director when Dr Pringle was on long leave, his active involvement in broad museological issues and the South African Museums Association, and his eighteen years as Director inevitably reduced the time Stuckenberg could devote to his entomological studies, but he nevertheless kept up his research output. Nor were diptera his only focus of professional interest. The acquisition by the museum of some bronze cannons and other artefacts from the Portuguese ship the *Santiago*, wrecked in the Mozambique Channel in 1585, led him into marine archaeology and a general study of Portuguese voyages of exploration off the south eastern coast of Africa. In 1998 his paper entitled 'The location and identity of the *Baixos da Judia*: Portuguese historical cartography of the Mozambique Channel and its relevance to the wreck of the *Santiago* in 1585' was joint winner of the Almirante Teixeira da Mota Prize awarded by the National Maritime Academy of Portugal, and he was further honoured by being elected a member of that body.

That Brian Stuckenberg the entomologist should successfully undertake historical research is not surprising. His interests were wide-ranging, and he brought to them a remarkable intellectual curiosity. His directorship at the Museum was characterised by his enthusiastic and informed encouragement and support of the work in all its research departments. Anyone, whether museum staff or not, could be sure of his careful interest in any object, idea or

problem they brought to his attention. At a gathering of family, friends and colleagues the week after his death, several spoke of their association with him, and a recurring theme was the way in which Brian Stuckenberg's personal interest and insight into what they were doing had a significant impact on their lives and careers.

He was a shy man, but realising that his position as Director made him something of a public figure and would require him to speak at various gatherings, he consciously developed his speaking skills. He became an entertaining and sought-after speaker whose diffidence and modesty could hardly conceal the immense authority with which he could speak on a range of topics.

After his retirement in 1994 he continued to work at the Museum as Honorary Keeper of Entomology, once more able to devote all his time to his specialist research. The Natal Museum celebrated its centenary in 2004, and Brian Stuckenberg had been at the institution for more than half of that time. It is interesting to note that his period of service overlapped by a few years in the 1950s with that of Alfred Cullingworth, a clerical and technical assistant who joined the Museum at its inception. Together they provided a century-long living oral tradition which can surely be matched by few institutions.

Dr Stuckenberg is survived by his wife Pam, two daughters and a son.

JOHN DEANE