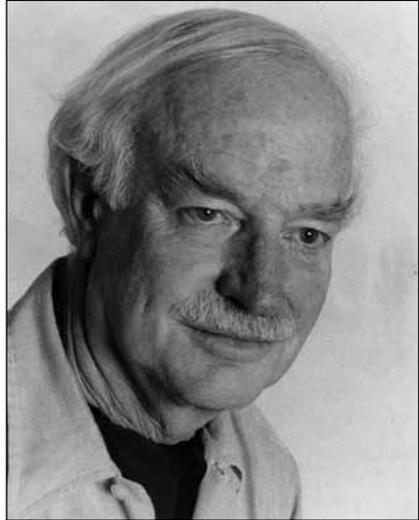

Robert Sanderson Crass (1921–2011)

R.S. CRASS, popularly known as Bob, who died in January 2011, was an authority on the freshwater fishes of KwaZulu-Natal and a familiar name in the letters columns of *The Witness*. He was the respected patriarch of trout fishing in South Africa and wrote the classic *Trout in South Africa*.

Crass grew up in the Kamberg area. Interviewed by *The Witness* in 2007, he recalled the first trout that bent his makeshift rod on the Little Mooi at the age of five. “My father rigged up a bamboo pole with some gut and a fly on the end. I let the fly drift in the current and the next thing there was a small fish on the end, which I hauled in with great joy.” Crass was schooled by his parents before attending Michaelhouse where he obtained a first-class matric and won the senior Latin prize. The outbreak of



Bob Crass

the Second World War prevented him from going to university in Cambridge, England, and he commenced a BSc at Rhodes University instead. After

his studies were interrupted by illness he completed his BSc at the Pietermaritzburg campus of the then Natal University College, graduating in 1945. He then went on to do an honours degree in zoology and a masters degree on the ecology of mayflies, which contained descriptions of new species.

Crass married Joan Orpwood in February 1950, the same month he joined the Natal Parks Board as one of Colonel Jack Vincent's first recruits. The NPB had been created in 1947 and Vincent, who took the helm in 1949, was tasked with getting the fledgling organisation off the ground.

Crass's brief was to become acquainted with the fish life of Natal's rivers and estuaries, and to devise management strategies for the benefit of anglers. As fisheries research officer, Crass documented the biology of trout and carried out a survey of indigenous fish in KwaZulu-Natal, discovering four new species in the process. He wrote the definitive book on the subject, *Freshwater Fishes of Natal*, published in 1964. Crass also wrote articles for *Farmers' Weekly* as well as newspaper columns on trout fishing. Some of these were collected in his *Trout Fishing in Natal* (1975). He was also chess columnist for the then *Natal Witness*.

Crass's later career with the Natal Parks Board saw him involved in research and management at Lake St Lucia and by the time of his retirement in 1983 he had become principal scientific officer. He retired in order to write *Trout in South Africa*, published in 1986, and to take over the management of the Underberg and

Himeville Trout Fishing Club, which he ran for 10 years before he and his wife moved to Howick. His retirement saw Crass become a keen gardener as well as prolific letter writer to *The Witness* where he often provided a balanced voice in the sometimes combative letters columns.

Former CEO of the Natal Parks Board and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, Dr George Hughes, described Crass as "one of the great gentlemen of KwaZulu-Natal". "Since 1949 Bob Crass played a highly respected and well loved role as the Natal Parks Board's fisheries expert and the first and best of the scientists studying the local populations of trout. A fine angler himself and a gifted writer, he added lustre to the sport and joy to his many, many friends who, through his articles, accompanied him along many a stretch of the province's wonderful rivers. A regular contributor on the subject of Darwinian evolution to *The Witness*, his letters were always articulate, dignified and respectful of other's views whilst firm in conviction.

I shall miss both his scintillating intelligence and warm humour and mourn the loss of a wonderful biologist and natural historian," he said.

Crass leaves his wife Joan, two daughters, Sally and Rose, and five grandchildren.

Crass's daughters, Sally Ovendale and Rose Strebel, said his family will remember him as an "extraordinarily generous and loving man" who always had time for each of them.

A memorial service was held at St Luke's Anglican Church in Howick.

STEPHEN COAN, with acknowledgments to *The Witness*