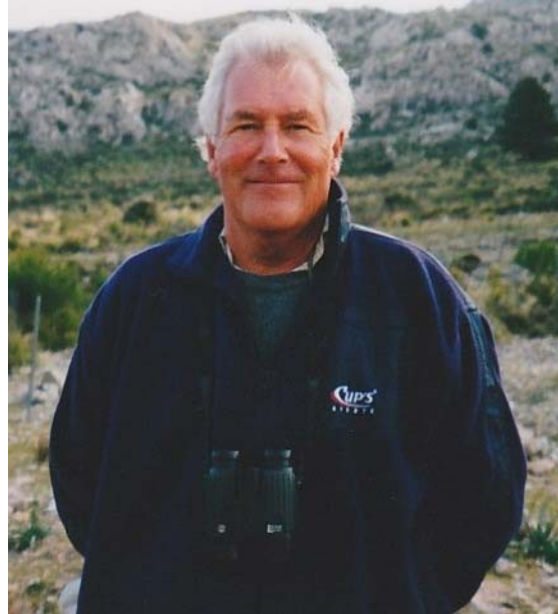


Graham Hearl 1939 – 2003

Chris Durdin, from Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays and then in the RSPB's Eastern England regional office in Norwich, prepared these notes to record Graham's contribution to the RSPB, to conservation and the birdwatching community. This was on Honeyguide's website at the time, and formed the basis for an obituary in the RSPB's Birds magazine. They remind us of a friend, holiday leader and conservationist. Updated by Chris in 2011.

Graham Hearl, born 26 January 1939, died 22 August 2003 aged just 64.

Just about every birdwatcher that went to Mallorca during the 1990s knew or knew of Graham Hearl. Graham was RSPB local representative on the island from 1990 to 2001. He was a contact point for RSPB members and others visiting the island, where so many birdwatchers had their first taste of birdwatching abroad.



Much of this contact was through the regular meetings held for birdwatchers in a hotel in Puerto Pollensa in the north of the island. These ran for many years in the spring and autumn (1989 - 2001). The meetings swapped information on birds and gave practical advice to visiting birdwatchers. At these meetings, Graham always brandished, with characteristic determination, a donations box for the Balearic Ornithological Group (GOB), the local bird conservation organisation. This raised £9,000 for GOB – 'real money', as Graham would put it, for a small organisation. Following Graham, others ran the meetings for a while but they have for the time being stopped.

As RSPB local representative on Mallorca, Graham was a valuable support to the RSPB's Investigations Department in connection with six Eleonora's falcons. These were illegally taken from the wild on the island in 1994 and 1995 and were discovered in captivity in Sandy, Bedfordshire – just down the road from RSPB headquarters. A court case in 1997 was followed soon after by the return of the birds to Mallorca, when four of the six birds were released back into the wild (the other two were too tame). Graham made all the local arrangements, including boats, accommodation for visiting RSPB staff and liaison with the police, GOB and media.

Mallorca was where Graham was best known in the bird world, but his involvement with birds and conservation went back much further. He ran the RSPB members' group in Cardiff – "one of the moving spirits in the early years" says Roger

Lovegrove. Graham was also on the RSPB Wales Committee from 1978 to 1980. He moved to Cornwall in 1980 and then to Mallorca in 1992.

Graham was also widely known as a birdwatching holiday leader and author. He led dozens of holiday groups, in the Balearic Islands and farther afield (including to mainland Spain, Cyprus and Austria), for the Travelling Naturalist, Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays, Naturetrek and Travel Club of Upminster. He was the author of 'A birdwatching guide to Mallorca', 'A birdwatching guide to Menorca, Ibiza and Formentera' and 'A birdwatching guide to Cyprus', and he edited the RSPB/GOB Mallorca Bird Reports 1 – 10.

For Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays, Graham was initially involved in Mallorca. For several years (1996–2002), Graham co-led our Menorca holidays where he became very fond of the hospitality at Matchani Gran, also adapting enthusiastically from his first love of birding to Honeyguide's all round natural history style. He was instrumental in setting up our holiday in Extremadura in 1998, at first based at a hotel in Trujillo, moving in the year 2000 to Finca Santa Marta where we have been returning to regularly ever since.

Our conversation often turned to music and dance. I was doing a lot of modern jive at the time, and Graham told of being hauled to the dance floor by a young woman on the grounds that he was old enough to know how to jive – and she was right.

Graham retired from active tour leading in 2002 and returned to Cornwall, where he died following a long illness.

Chris Durdin

Information also supplied by Roger Lovegrove (former RSPB Wales Officer), Guy Shorrocks from the RSPB Investigations Department and Graham Hearl.