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IN MEMORIAM

ROBERT (‘BOB’) BERKELEY GIBBONS (1949–2024)



Bob Gibbons died on 24 May 2024. Botanist, naturalist, wildlife tour guide and writer, he was above all a superb photographer of plants in the wild. During the last 20 years he visited Romania many times and helped to put the botanical importance of Transylvania firmly on the map for visitors, while raising awareness of the need for conservation of both wilderness and agricultural ecosystems. He was enthralled by ‘the ancient landscapes and abundance of wildlife’ he encountered in Romania in contrast to the UK’s diminished flora and wildlife.

Bob took numerous photographs of Transylvanian plants, habitats and landscapes on behalf of Fundatia ADEPT, many of which have featured in its publications and those of other conservation groups. He explored Romania not just in summer but throughout the vegetation seasons and some of his most memorable images are of autumn colours of forest leaves and fruits, or sheets of late-flowering *Colchicum autumnale* and *Crocus banaticus*.

Born on 20 July 1949 in Minehead, Somerset in south-western England, he studied biology and ecology at Wye College, Kent, part of London University, and gained a PhD from Durham University for research on the relict arctic-alpine montane plant communities of northern England. He then worked for conservation organizations, while building up his photographic and writing skills, which enabled him from 1985 to pursue a freelance career. From the late 1980s he illustrated and wrote field guides to the wildflowers and wildlife of Britain and Europe. As knowledgeable about birds and butterflies and other insects as he was about plants, he wrote more than forty books, including volumes on photographic techniques and wildlife in gardens. A lean, wiry man who, despite a lifelong vegetarian diet, possessed great physical strength and limitless energy, Bob was particularly remarkable in that he had lost the lower part of his left arm in a childhood accident with a firework. He loved what he did and seemingly always wore a happy smile.

At Wye he led a botanical expedition to Afghanistan, and from Durham he joined an expedition to Nepal prospecting a new national park. Henceforth, travel became a dominant part of his life. In the 1990s he set up Natural History Travel, less a conventional travel company than a fellowship of enthusiasts seeking wild plants, habitats and nature, for which he hardly needed to advertise as word spread by word of mouth. Participants would return year after year, and they would follow no other leader. In recent years Bob was often helped by his Californian partner Libby Ingalls, who joyfully shared his interests and enthusiasms. The tours concentrating on the Mediterranean, notably Crete and the other larger islands, and European mountainous regions, not least Transylvania and the Carpathians. He also led tours to the USA, Costa Rica, Southern Africa and elsewhere in the world.

Bob's death after a long illness has robbed the botanical community of an engaging, enthusiastic, humorous colleague and friend with an encyclopaedic knowledge, generously dispensed, of the European and Romanian flora. He was not at all a religious person, but his enduring memorial exists wherever a field, shore, heath or mountain is coloured by flowers.

Dr JOHN AKEROYD