



# Eric Watson's Algarve Diary 1989

E.V. Watson was one of the best-known bryologists of his era, both at home and abroad. He died in 1999 (Longton, 2001). He was very much an 'old-school' naturalist with broad interests beyond bryophytes, particularly in birds and flowering plants, and was a gifted artist. He was a great teacher and publicist of bryology, kept up a prolific correspondence and was a very genial companion on many BBS meetings. Those of us who knew them have very fond memories of both Eric and Joyce. He was also a diarist and his daughter Alison (now Alison Bacon) kindly copied the pages of his diary covering the BBS Algarve meeting in March 1989, where he and Joyce accompanied Peter and Jane Wanstall (Watson, 1994). With Alison's blessing these pages are transcribed here with a few annotations in square brackets. *David Long*

## March 23

Rise at 4.25 and are called for by Renate [Garrard] 5.25, to get us off to Gatwick by 5.40. Time spent with ACC [Alan Crundwell], Rod Stern and others before plane leaves at 8.05. Time seems to be made up on flight which gets us in to Faro airstrip at 10.15. Half hour later PSW [Peter Wanstall] meets us with our hire car and we visit bank (just in time before it shuts)

and get enough out for a few days. Thence up to La Serenida where we are welcomed by Mrs Thomas ('Phil') and her big Alsatian dog.

P.m. to a big extent frittered away by the pool, I reading a bit of Gerald Priestland's book '*Something understood*' – the part dealing with his time in India. Others swim and CCT

△ Eric Watson on the BBS Algarve meeting in 1989.  
*Joyce Watson*

[Cliff Townsend] draws attention to a few of the local plants in flower. These include species of *Fedia*, *Anagallis*, *Aristolochia*, *Smilax*, *Tamus*, *Cynoglossum*, *Centaurea*, *Galactites*, *Asphodelus*, *Anthyllis*, *Euphorbia* and many more; also a 'Cestrum hedge'. Lemon trees are in fruit.

Evening walk up to the crest of the hill where I am fortunate in getting good views of c. 4 Orphean Warblers. The garigue vegetation tends to repeat itself in varied patterns as we climb gently upwards. In general, rather few birds are about.

Evening meal at the 'Avenida' follows a talk by Roy Perry at the HQ hotel in which he outlines a rough plan for the week. Party at the meeting includes, besides ourselves and the Wanstalls and the Townsends, David Long and his friend, Chris Preston and Sarah Webster, Brian O'Shea and family, Peter Pitkin and many others.

▽ Eric Watson, Peter Wanstall and Jane Wanstall on the BBS Algarve meeting in 1989. Joyce Watson



### March 24, Good Friday

First full day in the field takes us up to Alté, and to the 'Fontes' and adjacent hill slope just beyond the town. Here there are interesting bryophytes to be seen, also some flowering plants like *Narcissus bulbocodium* and *Ophrys lutea*, *O. fusca* and others. R.S. [Rod Stern] takes duplicate photos for J [Joyce]. Afternoon walk is down a slope to a little river west of Alté but J and I miss the waterfall and its associated flora. We are among cork oaks and olives, *Arundo donax*, etc. and added Sedge Warbler, Cetti's Warbler and Nuthatch to the bird list. Very hot and sunny. Nice to see corncockle in flower.

Possible new bryophytes seen up at Fonte Grande are *Scorpiurium deflexifolium* and *Dicranella howei*. Putative *Bryum gemmiferum* [was *B. gemmiparum*] is collected from rocks washed by stream water.

I am most interested to meet again, after all these years, Barry Goater and his wife (B.G. now into moths in a big way) – here by dormobile after 1,500 mile drive, also Maurice Jones who

did an MSc on Cader bryophytes as far back as 1957 and who has retired to these parts after years of teaching at Chelsea 'Poly'.

### March 25, Easter Saturday

We set off, in good time, PJW at the wheel, for the hills N of Loulé and stop at the River de Algibre near Querença. This proves to be both a scenic and botanically interesting place. North-facing moist earth banks (with stony detritus) are a rich hunting ground for bryophytes and the green capsules of *Anthoceros* are conspicuous amid the small patches of little mosses, all knitted together in a ± continuous 'carpet' or community. Some are collected and we are able, later, to direct others who come back and do more extensive study in this area too.

Flowering plants on the banks of the river are also of interest and include *Astragalus lusitanicus* and several species of *Cistus* (including *C. populifolius*) pointed out by PJW. We then travel westwards to join Loulé – Salir road, visiting the Lago de Nave which is a flat area of dried-out lake bed, part turned into alluvial crop growing land (beans, vines, oats, etc.) where the rest of the party have spent the morning; here lunch is had by all beneath the cork oak trees. I chat with Roy Perry and Michael Proctor (arrived last night).

Afternoon site (reached late by us after looking at the Cattle Egrets, White Wagtail, etc.) is the Ribeira das Mercês and the Fonte Felipe. Just short of this we come upon a superb meadow-slope full of *Orchis italica* in full pale pink bloom. Notable in this narrow wooded valley are yellow-flowered *Anemone palmata* (looking like a composite) a lovely red Peony and Oleander in the stream bed. *Leucodon* is on the trees.

### March 26, Easter Sunday

Through Loulé, where Easter procession is in progress and down to Faro, turning right just

before airport to visit saltings, crossing causeway to the outermost bar of land. For c. 20 minutes I sit and watch waders on the saltings, getting good views of Kentish and Ringed Plovers, with a few Turnstones and Grey Plover; also plenty of Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls. Then, on far side of causeway, where *Cistanche phelypaea* is parasitizing shrubby *Salicornia*, see 2 White Storks and 2 Little Egrets on the flats and a Sandwich Tern and a Mediterranean Gull. Lunch is taken in sand dunes out of the quite keen wind – with characteristic sand-dune *Lotus* in evidence.

Then, on walk back to causeway, I run into a Woodchat Shrike and a pair of Black-eared Wheatear but get no luck with the Caspian Terns (bills like carrots!) which Barry Goater sees. We then move on to other spots: the Olhao ferry embarkation point and finally, Tavira – sizeable coast town well on way to Spanish border and with Moorish influence in its architecture.

Enormous numbers of blooms of an *Iris* with creamy-ochre flowers flank the road out from Tavira to Loulé. Dinner out on our own and tea with the Thomas family afterwards. No bryophytes collected all day long. Only the a.m. part successful from my point of view.

### March 27, Easter Monday

Much rain having fallen in the night, we decide to stick to the lower ground and make for Cap St Vincent. This proves to be c. 80 miles to west of us.

By the time we arrive weather has to a large extent cleared and, after picnic lunch in car, we are able to explore cliff face and cliff top flora in ± sunny conditions. Herring Gulls and Jackdaws disappointingly predominate on and about the cliffs, but the *Cistus-Armeria* garigue of the cliff top vegetation which extends for many acres, is of the utmost interest. It is also both colourful and species-rich.

A locally dominant shrub is a white-flowered *Cistus* with very resinous leaves. In other parts the big *Armeria*, with yellow chamaephyte *Coronilla*-type legume prevails; in yet others there is a rich mixture of taller scrub species – *Q. coccifera*, *Pistacia*, *Daphne gnidium*, etc., with understorey of varied herbs of such genera as *Salvia*, *Silene* (cf. *S. colorata*), *Anthyllis*, *Helianthemum*, *Polygala*, *Poterium*, *Euphorbia*, *Muscari*, *Festuca*, *Paronychia* and others. Of special interest is a low shrubby *Viola* with pale smoky blue flowers. Prostrate state of *Juniperus phoenicia* seems to be plentiful.

Birds of interest seen are: Black Redstart, Rock Thrush (the all-blue one) and wild Rock Doves along the cliffs. The drive to and from Cap St Vincent, via Portimao and Lagos, is disgusting on account of all the awful developments in 22 years since last we were here. Final brief stop is at the famous fort at Sagres, near Cap St Vincent, where another Black Redstart is seen.

### March 28

After losing most of the morning by doing things in Loulé and by going up the Alté road in error, we move east at speed through Salir and south at main road junction to the Ponte close to Querença where such good bryophyte ground is located. Michael Proctor shows me the quarry site with *Epipterygium* and one or two other items are taken with it. Then we move north again, taking road 124 out of Barranco do Velho, stopping just past a big hairpin bend in the road. There many tall Eucalypts are growing which we are told are *E. globulus* although the straight trunks and peeling strips of bark suggest to me *E. regnans* (as seen in the Dandenongs). Purpose of stop: to go along muddy track, just above river, to see *Claopodium whippleanum* on rock slabs. From chinks in the rocks several things are in fact collected; also *Cryphaea lamyana*

from a prostrate tree trunk (and *Cinclidotus mucronatus*). Difficult walking in parts, but a rewarding place, not least because of the range of shrubs etc. to be seen, including *Erica arborea* and *E. australis*, *Arbutus unedo*, several species of *Cistus*, *Viburnum tinus* (in full flower) and others.

Thence we move south to Sao Bras de Alportel and east a few km from there to big car park space below an interesting limestone (reddish) bluff. Collect a few more bryophytes here and see *Ophrys speculum*, *O. lutea*, and what I think is *O. bombylifera*; also a fine red-flowered Peony. Rest of party fail to turn up.

Final 'port of call' is the isolated peak of Sierra de Sao Miguel, to top of which we drive. Superb views; J photographs rainbow and poor PJW is held to ransom by an armed robber. No chance to stop for long or do anything about potential bird life.

Very heavy showers punctuate the day and in evening a very cold NW wind is blowing.

### March 29

Very cold start today. We set off for Monchique (where a lot of road works in progress); thence make our way by car up to the 3,000' peak, Foia. On last part of ascent I collect a few epiphytes on *Cupressus* trunks.

After finding a place out of the wind for lunch we explore summit bryophytes. These include species of *Grimmia* and *Racomitrium*, *Hedwigia* etc. on boulders (was there any *Andreaea*?); and on moist peaty ground *Pogonatum nanum*, *Pleuridium acuminatum*, *Bryum alpinum*, etc. Attractive groups of a blue flower which PJW thinks is *Romulaea*. Big radio installations and some construction work, however, make the summit unattractive. General vegetation is a kind of tall shrubby heathland made mainly of a pink-flowered *Erica* and *Ulex*.



△ Peter Wanstall and Eric Watson at the BBS AGM meeting in Liverpool, September 1988. Joyce Watson

In the afternoon PJW and I explore bryophytes on trees and on mud and rock banks along the river at Caldas de Monchique. Find a number of potentially interesting things.

It is c. 60 km back along roads very good in places, very poor in others. A stop by river produces only 1 Little Egret – nothing else. Birds on the whole have been sparse throughout – much quite promising looking country often being almost bereft of active bird life.

On return find others went to Picota, the other peak above Monchique.

### March 30

After getting most of our packing done we, with Jane and Peter Wanstall, seek out an area of excellent sandy beach, backed by a hinterland of umbrella pines and shallow lagoons in duneland setting. But waves tend to be too big, and undertow too strong, for J to do more than paddle. Picnic lunch by the lake which is populated by a group of what seem to be hoodless Mediterranean Gulls and a few Coots and Moorhens. After lunch we move on to a second area to be found further east and seaward of a vast new development ('Four seasons' country club, golf course, etc.) that seems to be as yet in its infancy. Soon, we feel convinced, this whole stretch of beautiful nature-rich coast (a Nature Park), a little west of Faro, will be ruined. Get views of 1 Greenshank, a few Little Egrets, Ringed & Kentish Plover, Sanderling, Sandwich Tern and White Stork; but could do with much longer and the power to get close to the birds, many of which are too far out on the mudflats.

Quite quickly we are back through Loulé to La Serenida, and, packing finished, receive tea from the kind 'Phil' Thomas.

P and J take us to airport at Faro and we have a smooth flight home despite slight turbulence as we pass through a big thunderstorm. It is twilight by this time and all is inky black below us and the light Prussian blue grading to gold – a kind of afterglow – above. As we descend into Gatwick all the lights far below are like so many bejewelled necklaces.

### References

- Longton, R.E. (2001). Eric Vernon Watson (1914–1999). *Journal of Bryology* 23, 73–74.
- Watson, E.V. (1994). Obituary. P.J. Wanstall BSc FLS (1924–1993). *Journal of Bryology* 18, 207–208.