

Obituary

Memories of Bob Boutilier in Cambridge

Our friend and colleague Bob came to Cambridge in 1992, becoming a lecturer in the Department of Zoology and a Fellow of Sidney Sussex College. He was promoted to Reader in 2000 and was currently under consideration for a Chair, which we now know he would have been awarded.

He was an extraordinarily productive research worker, with 62 papers and seven edited books from his Cambridge period. His particular focus of late was on how animals reduce their metabolic rates under different conditions of environmental stress – such as frogs enduring long cold periods during winter – a line of research with clear clinical implications. He studied a diversity of animals first and foremost amphibians, but also including porpoises, lamprey, trout, cod, squid and *Nautilus*.

His work was characterised by creativity in asking novel questions, in the rigour of the experiments so that results could be taken at face value, by the selection of the appropriate subjects, and by the clarity of his writing.

He trained eight Research students while in Cambridge, four of whom are continuing their work here. He also gave popular lecture courses to undergraduates and helped many in small group tutorials.

All of his endeavours were rewarded by election as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and by the award of the Fry Medal of the Canadian Society of Zoologists.

I got to know Bob well through *The Journal of Experimental Biology*, where our roles were reversed, with he being my boss. At the conferences that the journal organised, I learned some of the things that made Bob tick.

For example, his broad tastes in music, from Pink Floyd and rock-and-roll to more jazzy things – which I learnt about in Jazz bars with him in California. His piano and guitar playing, and his song writing. His interest in Formula One motor racing, which, while we were at a conference near Nice, required a trip

to Monaco so that he could drive around the circuit and have coffee at a café that would have been part of the pit straight. His good humour and fund of good stories. His mimicry of accents, particularly pompous British ones and even an Italian one, which enabled him to hold a 3-minute conversation in Italian without being able to speak or understand a real Italian word and without being rumbled by the recipient.

During many visits with him in hospital, his stoicism was remarkable and his humour extended to thinking of experiments he could do with the equipment that was attached to him. He joked often about how roles had changed from being the experimenter to the experimentee.

This refusal to accept that things might be difficult was also apparent last year during a snowstorm that brought roads around Cambridge to a standstill. Bob had to go to Australia that day and against advice – “5 inches of snow doesn’t stop a Nova Scotian” – abandoned cars in favour of a train to London. At King’s Cross station in London, there was chaos and an impossibly long queue for taxis. He then simply launched himself into the middle of the busy road outside until even a London cabbie stopped and took him to Heathrow airport, and so on to Australia.

Our lives in Zoology have been enriched, cheered and enlivened by his presence. Much good science has been accomplished. Students have been inspired to think about how animals work in an integrated way – from molecules to behaviour; there is much talk now that integrative physiology is new and the future, but this is what Bob did all his life.

We are all going to miss him greatly – especially those peels of laughter ringing down the corridor that so readily marked his presence.

Malcolm Burrows
Cambridge University