

## FRED WANLESS 1940–2017

It was with great sadness that we heard of the death of Fred Wanless on the 15th December 2017. Fred and I first met in the late 1960s when he was working as a photographic technician at the Medical Research Council laboratories at Mill Hill and I was a research assistant at King's College in London. What brought us together was our mutual fascination with spiders and we soon found ourselves meeting fairly regularly on field trips and at other events. Apart from his friendly and open character, what struck me most about Fred was his extremely focused attention on whatever he was doing. I remember that, while working on one of Eric Duffey's surveys of fenland spiders, he was universally known as "the chap with the double-barrelled pooter" since he would always end up with twice as many specimens as any of the rest of us at the end of an hour's collecting period! It was this ability to focus on a task, together with his meticulous attention to detail, that made him such a successful taxonomist. It was also probably what drew the attention of Ted Locket, who recommended him for the post of curator of arachnids at the Natural History Museum in London, following the tragic early death of his predecessor Doug Clark.

After his appointment at the Natural History Museum, Fred developed an interest in African jumping spiders, partly as a result of editing Doug Clark's notes on Simon's salticid type specimens (Clark 1974) and working on their collaborative paper (Wanless & Clark 1975); both of which were published after Clark passed away. By the early 1970s, I was working in Africa and, in 1975, moved to Maun in Botswana, on the southern edge of the amazing Okavango Delta. In February 1976, Fred visited me there with the aim of collecting and studying *Myrmarachne* and other salticids in this large and pristine African wetland. I can well remember Fred's amazement and delight in discovering no less than four *Myrmarachne* species living together in the same stretch of floodplain grassland along the Thamalakane River, only five minutes walk from my house in Maun. It allowed him to flesh out the basic descriptions of these species with details of their behaviour and the potential ant models for these Batesian mimics. We spent a month collecting and identifying spiders throughout much of the Okavango and surrounding areas of Botswana, and then a further three weeks in South Africa, where we visited museums in Pretoria and Grahamstown, and collected in various different habitats as the guests of Gerry Newlands and Bruno Lamoral. When his revision was finally published in 1978, it included 56 species of *Myrmarachne* from the afro-tropical region. It is a measure of how thorough this work was that only two or three new species have been described from Africa since, despite much intensive collecting throughout the continent.

He also played a significant role in the affairs of the British Arachnological Society, serving on Council as an ordinary member 1969–1973, 1974–1976 and 1986–1989 and as Meetings Secretary 1973–1978. From the mid-1980s to the early 2000s, Fred reviewed many arachnological manuscripts submitted to the *Bulletin of the British Arachnological Society*, especially those devoted to Salticidae. He



Fred (left) at the beginning of his career, with David Mackie.

published a number of short papers in the Society's journals from as early as 1963 (in the *Bulletin of the Flatford Mill Spider Group*—a predecessor of the British Arachnological Society). Examples include two papers on the copulatory organs of the British *Lepthyphantes* species illustrated by first class micro-photographs (Wanless 1971, 1973). Among his earlier papers was the description of two *Euophrys* species, *E. omnisuperstes* and *E. everestensis*, both collected on Mt Everest (Wanless 1975). The former species, as the specific name implies, has the distinction of living at the highest altitude known for any spider, with specimens collected from between 5500 m and 6100 m. So far as is currently known, these species are confined to a small area on Mt Everest and Mt Makalu, about 19 km south-east of Everest.

Fred was always extremely generous with his time in helping others interested in spiders. After I returned from Botswana to the UK in 1978, I spent many hours in the spirit room at the Natural History Museum, sorting and identifying spiders I had collected in Botswana and Nigeria. Fred not only gave much assistance in this task but also encouraged me in my first tentative steps in the systematics of African wolf spiders, and it is largely due to him that two papers were published in the early 1980s. Rather more significantly, he provided encouragement and advice to Wanda Wesolowska who visited the museum from Poland in the course of her global revision of the genus *Heliophanus*, the largest of all salticid genera. I like to think that it was partly as a result of his encouragement that she went on to completely revolutionize our knowledge of the systematics of African jumping spiders over the following four decades.

Jumping spiders (Salticidae) were his favourite group, to which he devoted 29 taxonomic papers accounting for some 760 printed pages in total. The first revisionary paper was on the genus *Mantisatta* (Cutler & Wanless 1973). His first major paper was a revision of *Belippo* and *Myrmarachne* in the Afrotropical fauna (Wanless 1978a). *Myrmarachne* is a large and difficult genus which hitherto had been in a state of confusion as a result of poor original descriptions and many consequent synonymies, which Fred sorted out. At this stage, his interests had shifted towards basal salticids,