



OBITUARY

R. S. (BOB) GEORGE

1921 - 2013

Bob George was born in Gloucestershire on 5 May 1921 and died on 9 November 2013 aged 92. He was a fighter pilot and later a schoolmaster with a passion for natural history, and became one of Britain's foremost authorities on fleas (Siphonaptera). After a childhood in Gloucester, Bob joined the RAF in 1941, flying Spitfires in no. 616 Squadron based in South Yorkshire. In 1944 Bob converted to the Meteor, the only Allied jet to fly in World War 2, and after the war he became a jet pilot instructor before leaving the RAF in 1946. Returning to Gloucester, Bob became a biology schoolmaster in his old school. Later in his career he was Principal of Adult Education at Sawston Village College, Cambridgeshire, where he helped to set up the Village College Music Festival.

His interest in fleas began in 1949 when, living next to a butchers' shop, he trapped mice and sent their fleas to Frans Smit, curator of the Rothschild Collection of Siphonaptera at the Natural History Museum, Tring, in Hertfordshire. Two of the species had never been recorded in Gloucestershire before, and this caused Bob to shift his interest from beetles to fleas, attracted by being able to add new knowledge to the British fauna and noting that "studying fleas had one great advantage over beetles - there was little competition."

His first paper, *The Siphonaptera of Gloucestershire*, was published in 1957, and by 1966 he had supplied more than 10,000 records of some 60 species of flea to the Biological Records Centre (BRC), with the Siphonaptera National Recording Scheme recognised in 1964. In 1969 he wrote a leaflet on *Collecting Fleas for the Amateur Entomologists' Society*, and in 1974 the first atlas of British fleas was published.

In 1982 he retired to Bournemouth; around this time his interest in fairy wasps (Mymaridae) motivated him to establish Marris House Nets, the first company in the UK to produce Malaise Traps, the best method of collecting mymarids. In 1988 Bob appeared on the BBC's *Going Live* programme, appealing for people to send him fleas combed from their pets. The *Atlas of the Fleas (Siphonaptera) of Britain and Ireland*, published in 2008, represents the results of Bob's 60 years of recording British fleas.

Bob George was an Honorary Life Member (1402) of the Amateur Entomologists' Society, a Fellow of the Linnean Society and a founding member of the Gloucester Wildlife Trust — he was the first person to chair its council.

In 1943 Bob married Dorothy Benoist. Dorothy died in 2005 and they are survived by their son and two daughters.

Victoria Burton