

## Obituary

### Charles Alan (Alan) LILL (1940–2023)



Associate Professor,  
Behavioural Ecologist  
and Evolutionary  
Biologist,  
Ornithologist

Associate Professor Alan Lill passed away on 14 June 2023 after a sudden brain infarction three days earlier. This was unexpected as he was very active and in otherwise good health, with a youthful disposition for his 82 years. He is survived by his spouse Chris, son Francis, grandson Kepler, sister-in-law Kath and his remaining brother Graeme who resides in the UK.

Alan was born in December 1940 in Cleckheaton near Leeds, England to Eric Lill and Doris Brenchley – the youngest of six siblings and one of five brothers. He was a dedicated student and an accomplished sportsman, representing Yorkshire at athletics, captaining his school in rugby, playing cricket and tennis and later playing at high level amateur rugby and soccer.

Alan met his wife to be Chris, who was from Kenya, at the University of Bristol in England where he completed an Honours Degree in Zoology in 1962. He moved to Edinburgh University in Scotland and married in 1965. Their son Francis was born in 1966. In 1966 he completed his PhD in Zoology on social organisation and mating behaviours of domestic poultry.

In 1967 the family moved to the West Indies for what would be five years. We were based in the tropical rainforest near Simla, Trinidad where Alan had taken up an appointment as a Research Fellow at the Institute for Animal Behaviour operated by New York's Rockefeller University and the New York Zoological Society. His behavioural bird research there focussed on Toucans, the Plain Antvireo and Manakins. 1971 saw a move to cosmopolitan New York City for the next two years as he continued his Fellowship and was also Assistant Professor at the Rockefeller University.

Our family moved to Australia when Alan was appointed to the Zoology Department at Monash University in 1973 under its long serving Head of Department Jim Warren. Being an ethologist, Alan was then also appointed to the Psychology Department in 1974. His earliest bird research at Monash focussed on the Superb Lyrebird, Crimson Rosellas, Short-tailed Shearwaters and Bowerbirds. His sporting love continued to be a focus for him. He played cricket for Monash as an all-rounder and captained one of their teams. He continued playing up to the age of 53. He also became a rapid convert to Aussie Rules and the Richmond Football Club. In 1987 he undertook a year's sabbatical leave at the University of Canterbury's Edward Percival Field Station in Kaikoura with research interests there and on return covering Rallidae spp., the Rifleman, Silvereyes and Australia's Rainbow Bee-eater. In 1996 he was appointed Associate

Professor in Biological Sciences and Psychology at Monash. He taught in both Departments from 1980 to 2007 and amongst other things developed the first Behavioural Ecology course there. In 2007 Alan stepped back from formal teaching and in 2009 retired from the School of Biological Sciences but continued in an honorary position. This meant he could mix his research with continuing supervision and mentoring of Honours and Post Graduate students. He held the position of Honorary Senior Research Fellow with the School until 2015. His animal research interests at this time covered an ever expanding range of birds, with his supervision extending to research also into marsupials and mammals such as the Domestic Dog, Sugar Glider, Brush-tailed Phascogale and Leadbeater's Possum.

In 2015 Alan accepted an invitation from Michael Clarke, Professor of Zoology at La Trobe, to join the Department of Environment and Genetics at La Trobe University as an Honorary Associate, where he continued his research and mentoring. He also served on La Trobe's Animal Ethics committee from 2016 to 2019. Birding research interests from his later years at Monash and then at La Trobe shifted to examining the interaction between birds and the urban environment, with special focus on Welcome Swallows, Common Mynas, Wood Ducks, Little Ravens, Corellas, Galahs, Cockatoos and Magpies. He worked with many students on these projects and always made sure that their research didn't languish in unpublished theses.

Alan's supervision over the years included 72 Honours students, 27 Doctorates and 4 Masters students. He authored or co-authored, mainly with students and other colleagues, 137 papers and he contributed chapters and entries in various books such as *The Birds of Australia* (notably on Lyrebirds) and regularly reviewed manuscripts for journals. He also held many offices in professional societies and on committees, including (since 2000) the now Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's Animal Ethics Committee. He was also involved as a consultant further afield for parties such as National Geographic Television, Healesville Sanctuary, Television New Zealand, Melbourne Water, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and in the mid 1990s for David Attenborough's *The Life of Birds*.

Alan was a long-time member of the Australian Bird Study Association but didn't get actively involved in the organisational side until he joined the committee in 2013 as Vice President. His skill at publishing research papers was outstanding and as a consequence in 2015 he was asked to take over as Editor of *Corella*. Authors and referees were always impressed by his professional approach in making sure that worthwhile research was always published. He held both offices until his passing.

When ABSA's annual award for the best published paper in *Corella* was being judged Alan withdrew his papers from the list as he thought that as Editor it was not a "good look". This was even though the committee pointed out that the judges were not involved in editorial or publishing activities. His papers would have been at the forefront for an award. His latest project with the Association was to work with Eleanor Rowley in publishing a mountain of data collected by her and her late husband Ian on Western Australian Magpies. Sadly this was cut off mid-stream.

Alan will be greatly missed by his family, friends and colleagues. The Australian Bird Study Association will miss his contribution and insights. The wider bird community has lost a truly dedicated ornithologist. The scientific community has lost a passionate behavioural ecologist and mentor.

**Francis Lill**