

Dr Nigel Stringer 1949–2024: an obituary



Fig. 1. Nigel Stringer. Photograph © Ian Morgan.

Nigel Stringer died suddenly just before Christmas, only eight days before his 75th birthday. He will be remembered as a leading member of the mycological community in Wales for his particular expertise in plant pathogens, especially rusts.

Nigel was born on 28 December 1949 and attended Llanelli Boys' Grammar School before moving to the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. Here he gained a BSc followed by a PhD entitled "The biology of fungi on *Ulex europaeus* needles". One of his favourite stories related to an incident said to have occurred during his exploration of the Aberystwyth hinterland. He recounted that on one occasion his head-first inspection of the inner reaches of a gorse thicket attracted attention which subsequently led to his arrest and a trip to the cells in the local police station. Nigel told them to phone the department secretary, but she, knowing that Nigel was renowned as a practical joker, said she had never heard of him. In the end it fell to his department head to confirm his story and secure his release.

His first "scientific" employment was with the Welsh Water Authority scientific unit at Llanelli where one of his tasks included the sampling of rivers to determine pollution levels based on the presence of aquatic invertebrates and other indicators. Perhaps the most challenging and ultimately rewarding campaign was his contribution, aided by his friend R. H. ('Dic') Davies, towards the safeguarding of Carmel Woods on a limestone ridge in south-east Carmarthenshire from planned quarrying activities. After extensive legal challenges, and much work by the NCC/CCW team and NGO

partners, the site later became a National Nature Reserve. By the early 1990s Nigel had joined the staff of the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), initially in mid-Wales then later with the Carmarthenshire team where much of his work involved Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

Throughout this time, Nigel maintained his natural history interests and assisted Dr. Philip Jones, the Carmarthenshire Fungus Recorder, with fungus recording activities throughout Carmarthenshire. Nigel regularly supported autumn 'fungus forays' held by the Llanelli Naturalists' Society and, in recent years played an active role in support of events run by the neighbouring Pembrokeshire Fungus Recording Network (PFRN). A favourite observation of his was that on any fungus foray he would rarely have to venture beyond the car-park: without fail he would compile an extensive list of rusts, usually including notable or first records for the county.

Nigel, as one of the Welsh Microfungi Group*, will be remembered for his contribution to a series of checklists, identification guides and red data lists compiled, published and updated by the Group since 2015 (see: <https://www.aber.ac.uk/waxcap/links/index.shtml>). In recognition of their efforts the Group received the BMS 'Field Mycology Award' in 2019.

In the course of his studies Nigel established extensive links with other specialists in the field including leading experts in Europe and North America. In recent years, his studies were enhanced through access to DNA-barcoding of specimens which in turn supported a number of projects focussing on rusts and mildews with the output appearing in various publications including this one together with regular contributions to PFRN newsletters.

A great raconteur and communicator, Nigel always entertained those who surrounded him as he educated them on the finer points of rust biology. He was always anxious to encourage non-mycologists who brought him rusts by saying something like "Yes, So-and-So, actually quite a common rust but one of my favourites, Well done! Do collect more."and one was hooked. Many people valued Nigel's genuine friendship and marked kindness as well as respecting his scientific knowledge and contribution. He is most sadly missed.

David Harries, Ian Morgan, Arthur Chater,
Debbie Evans, Paul Smith & Ray Woods

* Nigel Stringer, Ray Woods, Arthur Chater,
Debbie Evans & Paul Smith.