**CONFIDENTIAL**

Date Transcribed: 21st May 2020

INT:

P26:

**INT: We will come back to that as it’s a really interesting point. The first question is how long have you been doing any recording and how did you start?**

P26: Any recording of any sort?

**INT: Yes.**

P26: Let’s say sixty years.

**INT: And how did you get into it? Did you have an interest in natural history first?**

P26: Didn’t really have many options with my father being who he was.

**INT: Very much a childhood thing? Have you been recording all through your life or did you have a break?**

P26: I’m not a very good systematic recorder and in fact the only thing I systematically recorded, really, has been moss and for some reason it didn’t click that I should be submitting all this data to BRC or whatever. It’s only in the past ten years that I’ve been doing a proper job and submitting data.

**INT: When you were collecting information for your own observations before, were you just using that for your own purposes?**

P26: Yes, basically, yes.

**INT: I’ve seen some of your papers based on your own records, you’re collecting it for scientific purposes as well?**

P26: Is that the [inaudible 00:01:30] data?

P26: Yes. Those are my father’s. He was a really systematic recorder, he wrote everything down, I’m far too lazy for that.

**INT: What was it that finally prompted you to start submitting your moth records?**

P26: Embarrassment.

**INT: Was it [Name] that persuaded you to do it?**

P26: Not really. I think it was probably [Name].

**INT: Was it?**

P26: Who was dropping gentle hints. I did do some. I submitted occasional records. There was that [Name] and [Name] book back in the early 80s, I guess. I certainly sent them all my records. Part of the problem was I’m the type of person who needs to be prompted and there was no system. Having submitted the record, I was told by [Name] that they were doing this book so I sent him all the records I had. So all my 1980s records are in that book. The problem was there was no follow up, the first I knew about it was a supplement appeared which I didn’t put any records into. I’m the sort of person who needs to be connected to a system who makes me do things and I think a lot of recorders are like that.

**INT: Do you have that for the moths do you think?**

P26: That’s specifically for moths. The slightly odd thing is that I go out a lot and find plants and see plants, I’d be really bad at contributing to Atlas 2020 and so on. I’ve done a tiny bit. I’m definitely not a twitcher. Sorry, can you hear me ok with this plane going over?

**INT: It’s going over my house too.**

P26: Definitely going over my house too.

**INT: I think we must live close enough together then.**

P26: What was I saying?

**INT: You’re not a twitcher, you’re an ecologist.**

P26: Yes, I’m not a twitcher so I tend to go to places because they’re interesting places rather because there’s rare species there. If I see a rare species, it’s probably well known so why would I record it?

**INT: What is it that makes a place interesting for you? Is it the habitat more than the species?**

P26: Yes. I mean interesting habitats tend to have interesting species, don’t they?

**INT: Yes, so a bit of both. With your moth trapping and your moth recording, what area are you covering with that? Is it just at home? I know you do a lot at [Nature reserve] don’t you?**

P26: I always start at home, two, three times a week in season. There are people, [NAME] is one of them, that trap every night, I don’t do that. The last two years I’ve done a systematic effort, helped by a group of about half a dozen people and we’ve got a paper coming out in the naturalist major journal. We managed to almost double the moth list and this is a well reported sight. It just shows you what intensive work at a site does and it’s now one of the richest sites in [COUNTY]. One of the really exciting things is the length of the recording history, there’s that extraordinary set of papers back in 1879 which lists lots of stuff, we can tell what was about then. With the moths, there were around 100 species which hadn’t been recorded since 1879, most of which we’ve recorded again.

**INT: How often were you trapping, how often were you recording there last year?**

P26: I’ll send you a draft that’ll tell you exactly.

**INT: You need to be out every week during the peak season to see exactly what you’ve got?**

P26: Yes. One of the interesting things that I was able to do because I had an identical trap in my garden, I did a plot, species against numbers, species accumulation count basically, for the two sites. Whereas the garden levels off, the [Nature reserve] site goes on and on and on, shows no sign of levelling off at all. I did wonder if that was because the garden site was dominated by a few weedy species, so I excluded the 5 species from the analysis and got the same results. A place like [Nature reserve] is incredibly species rich and we’ve got them up to over 700 now. It would be easy to get to 800, probably to 9. We’ve got areas we haven’t factored in at all, they’re inaccessible to moth traps. Again, if you went there you’d probably pick up many species. [INT], can we break off for a few minutes?

**INT: Yes, that’s fine.**

P26: Is that alright? I’ve got a call coming in that I wasn’t expecting but I really ought to take.

**INT: That’s ok. I have another interview lined up at 4 o’clock.**

P26: I will call you within the next ten minutes, I promise.

**INT: I’ll just stay on this call and you can just rejoin.**

P26: Okay, my apologies.

**INT: That’s fine, no worries.**

**INT: Do you think its been down to [Name] there’s been an increase in recording the past few years?**

P26: I don’t know really. The increase in micro recording is the appearance of books. There are now two good books for people doing micros. Before the books were obscure and not well illustrated. Now both the field guide and photo guide are the ones which do enable one to make a stab at the identifications, others I’d just send off to [Name].

**INT: Does he give you support as well if there’s something you’re not sure about?**

P26: He’s really good. I only use him for [inaudible 00:13:35] because at home I’m in [VICE COUNTY] and I use guy called [Name] who’s up on [REGION]. They work in very different ways. [Name] prefers me to save them all up until the end of the year, I’ll send him 50 test tubs to look at. Micros I do by photograph. My photography skills aren’t good enough for micros. [Name] is happy to have them sent as they come in and deal with them there and then.

**INT: Have they supported you in your learning a lot then do you think?**

P26: Yes, it’s been extremely helpful to have people who can tell me where I’ve got it wrong.

**INT: Do they ever ask you to go to particular places to record?**

P26: There’s a [COUNTY] moths Facebook site, the only thing I look at on Facebook, and [Name] sometimes makes suggestions that people should do things. There’s best part of 200 people on this site I think, there are one or two very active people in different parts of the country and you can see that by looking at different parts of the maps.

**INT: You mentioned the NPMS, what persuaded you to start with that?**

P26: I think it’s a good idea to have and we need abundance data for plants, all we have is TETRAD or MONAD data. One of the species I’ve been interested in is [inaudible 00:15:42] A project student who surveyed it and found 250 plants, we surveyed it two years ago and found 6000, its expanded like mad. As well as that, I’ve been looking at the history of that. Apparently, 5 sites in the 19th century known for this, it was first discovered in [Nature reserve] in 1982, it almost certainly wasn’t there before that because it’s not mentioned in the [Nature reserve] survey of 1879. It seems to have colonised. The literature had 5 records but what was strange is there was one called [PLACE] in [VICE COUNTY] and one called [PLACE] [VICE COUNTY] and one called [PLACE] in [VICE COUNTY] and one called [PLACE] in [VICE COUNTY]. It turns out that the 2 [VICE COUNTY] ones were just errors but people have seen the name and assumed it was the same place. The historical data is full of weird data of that sort. It looked like it died out at several sites when it didn’t, it died out at all the sites, but there were only 3 in the first place, possibly even two because one of them may be a confusion.

**INT: You’re right, with the plants its so much presence or absence, isn’t it?**

P26: That’s pretty much what people record. NPMS is a good idea, I just think they’ve gone about it in a very cumbersome way and to make it difficult to sustain it, I think.

**INT: Because it makes it difficult for the recorders?**

P26: It’s a lot of work for the recorders, they ask quite a bit. You’re meant to do 5 quadrats in your 1k square and then they want you to estimate abundance. The problem with that is anyone who is taught that knows people come up with wildly different estimates. Ok, if it’s one observer, but you should be able to get trends through time but of course their ability to record may change over time, they may become better at estimating or something like that. I think there are a lot of problems with it. I think it was unnecessary to do it in this systematic way, it would have been better to have chosen a number of places which you could get a team of people to collaborate on and have fewer sites. I thought I’d support it because it was basically a good idea.

**INT: So, you visited this new site and it wasn’t worth it?**

P26: It was unrecordable, there was nothing to record. There’s no point in recording a field because you’ll see changes over time, not to say they’ll be interesting.

**INT: What was their response when you reported that back to them?**

P26: They sent me a map, a screen grab of the various areas highlighted that would be good places to record. I’ve been back, thinking, did I miss something but no I didn’t. One of the areas that they thought was good vegetation had just been ploughed out and was going to be used for housing, probably, if not housing, there was certainly a large amount of drainage pipes waiting to be installed and it was certainly replanned anyway. The other was through one corner of the square, they thought I could record the riverside vegetation but it was basically cultivated right up to the edge. There are trees but the only decent patch I could find had a large quantity of road [inaudible 00:19:59] dumped on it. It’s not much point putting in a lot of effort for a long term study unless there’s some reasonable chance you’re going to be able to sustain that vegetation free of those sorts of impacts for a long period of time. That’s why I don’t think the problem is, maybe they say we’re interested to the extent these habitats get destroyed and that may be true bit it’s pretty dispirited of a recorder.

**INT: Do you see your recording changing over the coming years? Do you see yourself recording other species groups or do you think you’ll stick to the moths?**

P26: I’m too old to learn many new species. My brain doesn’t work that way.

**INT: So its going to be moths and targeting those reserves?**

P26: Plants and moths it will be, yes. I might try and resuscitate my moss identification skills.

**INT: I guess, finally, is there anything you can say about what motivates you to do that recording and what keeps you going with it at home or at the other side?**

P26: Horror about what’s happening to the natural world, classic shifting baseline. I can remember when I was a lad how different things were, the younger you are, if you’re age 20 now, you’ve never seen those sights in that way, there are special cases. The thing that horrifies me is that lots of plants, in particular, I used to think of as not particularly scarce and I wouldn’t have in my mind the locality for them, they were things that you’d encounter going on a walk in the countryside. Nowadays, you have to think yes that grows there and their abundance has shrunk so much. I’m a keen conservationist so we need the data. The data are fundamental. You can’t do the conservation work unless you know…

**INT: It is, like you say, it is horror. I’m not that young anymore but even in my lifetime I think about driving, I’m from the Fens, the [county], driving across to my grandparents house which was sort of 10 miles away, you what they say about insects hitting the windscreen? I remember that as a child and you just don’t get it anymore, do you?**

P26: You don’t, you just don’t. Quite often, on some evenings, some nights, you might see a few moths in the headlights but a few moths in the headlights is all it is. Put a moth trap down, I still get the same number of moths I used to get in a moth trap, so I think it’s largely the smaller things that seem to have disappeared. What you tend to get is a vast numbers of the large things. There are aspects that I can’t quite tally as it were, but there’s no doubt that there’s less of it about. Some measurements you make imply that it’s not that bad, there clearly is controversy in the literature. There’s the insect Armageddon papers and there’s [Name] saying there’s no problem at all.

**INT: [Name] likes to…**

P26: He likes to be the icon at last.

**INT: That’s so lovely, thank you so much for your time.**

P26: Not at all, what’s the schedule for the project? What are you going to report, as it were?

**INT: So, the ideas that we have an app that will make recommendations to people to visit.**

P26: Places that have not been well recorded?

**INT: Places that data would help improve the models that we have. It might not be that they are particularly under recorded, it might be that they have a unique set of environmental conditions or variables that mean a record from that area would significantly help improve the model. It’s trying to be a bit more sophisticated than just saying this is a guess. The idea is that we will have a platform that anybody could go on and see where records are needed then people could also register on that platform and put in some personal information about where they live and how far they want to travel, what species groups they’re interested in, things like that, which would then be used to give people personalised recommendations, so this is a place that you could visit based on your personal interests and where you are. The idea is that we’re going to launch that this year but the idea is that we’re going to have an element of co-design with people in the recording community as well. The idea is that we’ll launch a basic version, we’ll have some options within it and people will be able to say, I like this, that works well for me, I don’t like that, and they’re involved in the design process as well and we’ll have an evaluation of that over the winter and have a more final version that we’ll launch and test next year. So, if you wanted to hear more about the project as it develops, there’s a sign up to a kind of mailing list that I can send you the link to and you’ll get emails from [RESEARCH INSTITUTE] about the project and you can get involved if you want to, you don’t have to, you can just hear about the project. I can send you that if you’re interested?**

P26: Yes, do.

**INT: It’s interesting to hear your thoughts about the data about the state of nature report because that does resonate with what we’ve heard from other people, people have been trying to use the data and that continuity to which is not available from a lot of sites and the gaps, it reflects what a lot of other people are saying.**

P26: That doesn’t surprise me.

**INT: No. Okay, thank you so much. Lovely to talk to you. I’ll send you that link.**

P26: Very good.

**INT: Okay.**

P26: Good luck with it.

**INT: Thank you very much. Okay. Bye.**

P26: Bye.

**[Ends 00:27:48]**