

## OBITUARY – DAVE McDERMOTT

**13<sup>th</sup> March 1951 – 4<sup>th</sup> June 2018**

**Owen Garvie** (with contributions from Phil McDermott, Dustin McDermott,  
Andrew Mayer, Silvia Kirkman and Steve Woodhall)

10<sup>th</sup> September 2018



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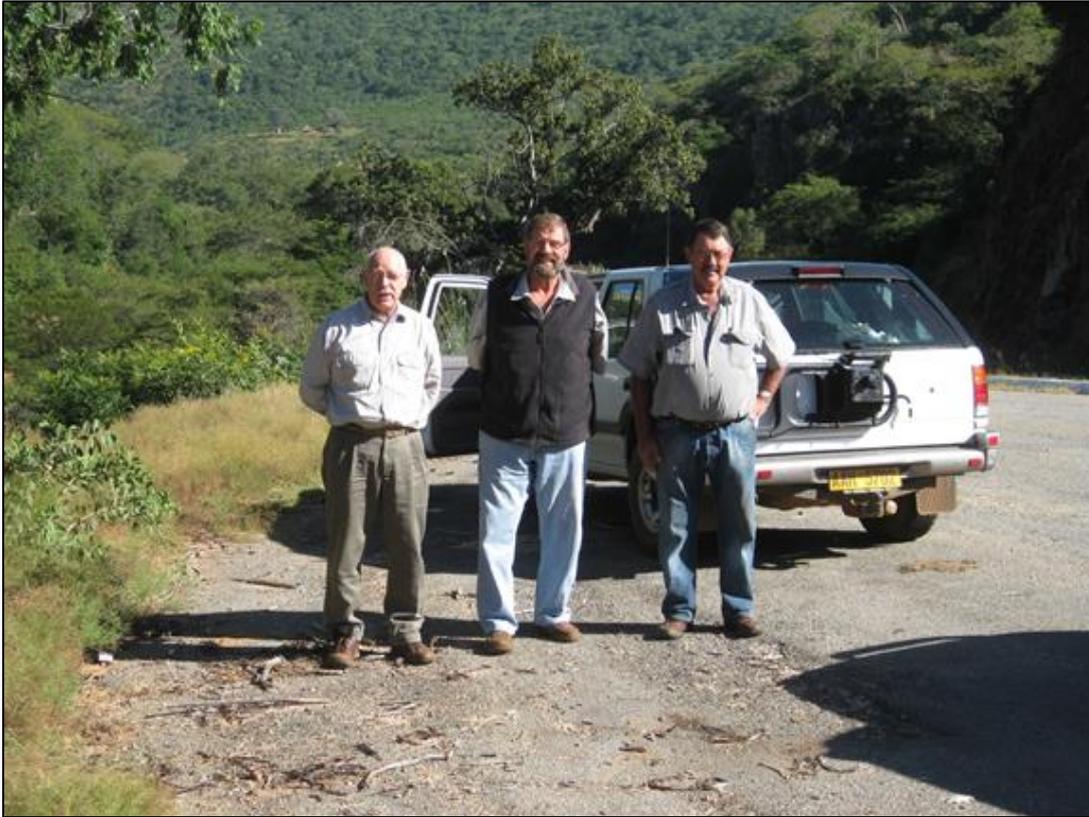
Many of you will be aware that Dave McDermott, Honorary Life Member of LepSoc Africa and former Council Member and Secretary, passed away recently. Dave was an enthusiastic participant of the SABCA project, both as provincial leader of the Mpumalanga Province, where he facilitated field survey data and as data contributor by allowing the Society to digitise and use distribution data from his private collection. Silvia Kirkman remembers him as always jolly and a pleasure to work with.



2005 SABCA Steering Committee- Dave McDermott - back row 3rd from left

Dave was born in Cape Town on 13 March 1951 and together with his older brother Phil and younger sister Margie grew up on a large two and half acre plot in Marlborough in Salisbury, Rhodesia. In 1958 Dave and Phil started collecting butterflies and this hobby became a lifelong passion for both of them. Phil recalls that a lot of people (including his two sons Matthew and Dustin) have wondered how he got the name of Dooze. This happened when he was about 16 and went on a date with one of the local girls. One of our neighbours was quizzing him the next day on how the date went, and declared that Dave had dooze and managed to have his way with her. The nickname stuck and he was known as Dooze ever since.

I first met Dave Mc Dermott at the annual LepSoc Africa Conference at Onderstepoort in September 1995 and he was immediately friendly and helpful to me and my wife Wendy. We soon realized that we had something in common as we had many fond memories of growing up in Rhodesia and collecting butterflies, way back in the 1960s. Having relocated from Kimberley back to Johannesburg in 2002, I visited Dave at his home in Northcliff and we became good friends. Over the past 12 years we have been on many butterfly collecting trips together.



Dave McDermott flanked by Owen Garvie on the left and his brother Phil on the right (Zimbabwe – April 2013)



Dave McDermott relaxing after a successful butterfly outing near Louis Trichardt

Dave was a professional journalist and met his wife Wendy in Umtali (now named Mutare) in the eastern highlands of Rhodesia (now named Zimbabwe), whilst he was working as a sports editor for the Umtali Post. He had a distinguished career and was highly respected amongst his colleagues for his integrity and accurate reporting. He worked on the Rhodesian Herald in Salisbury (now Harare), and also had a stint with a local newspaper in Perth, South Australia, before returning to work in Durban and Johannesburg. Dave had an active life outside of butterflies as shown by his memorial service at Old Parktonions Sports Club, where a very large turnout of many special friends and family came to celebrate the life and memory of Dave McD, Big Dave, McD, and The Dooza. A complementary eulogy was presented by Derek Watts (Carte Blanche journalist colleague and close friend of Dave).

Dave loved sport and he was a good rugby player at school, but unfortunately, as a result of a back injury, he needed surgery with plates and steel pins fitted into his spine/pelvis. This meant, at times, that he had difficulty sometimes overcoming obstacles, whilst out in the bush looking for butterflies, and I would have to help him occasionally before we continued our hiking.

Dave had a way with words second to none. When watching rugby together on TV and seeing someone make an error, he would remark "stupid boy". He always supported his two sons in their sporting activities whilst at Parktown Boys High School – Matthew in his rugby and Dustin in his cricket. He had the most amazing way with words – able to sum up any situation or event with a quirky one liner. All of us are likely to recall one of Dave's lines – "that's as useless as tits on a bull"; "I suppose the fairies took my screwdriver Matt"; or lovingly referring to Wendy as the "Sergeant Major" when she stamped her authority on his fashion decisions.

Dave was a dedicated family man and did all he could for Wendy his wife and his two sons Matthew and Dustin. He also enjoyed the five dogs (Jack Russell's and Maltese Poodles), which he referred to as "snivelers". But his favourite pooch was "Bullie" a big rotund bulldog that was his close companion whilst he was running his business from home.

Dave was always "bok" – up for a butterfly trip, and would be ready on time – early in the morning and waiting at his entrance gate, nets, traps and a cool-bag full of food, snacks and cool-drinks, ready for the trip. We spent a lot of time in the field together. Our most successful and memorable trips were as follows:

Enseleni Forest, Levubu, & Mpaphuli near Thohoyandou – Limpopo.  
Serenity Eco Reserve & Butterfly Farms, Malelane – Mpumalanga.  
Port St Johns – Eastern Cape.  
Honde Valley, Inyanga & Bvumba Mountains – NE Zimbabwe.  
Rusitu and Haroni Forests, Chimanimani – SE Zimbabwe.

Dave was an astute observer often sitting quietly watching a bush or muddy patch on the road, while the rest of us were dashing here and there frantically chasing after butterflies. Dave would then stand and slowly move and with a quick swing of his net would bag the perfect specimen he was after.

Over many years of collecting Dave amassed a superb butterfly collection, each specimen accurately labelled and set at the base of the pin according to the British standard of pinned specimens. I do remember his joy and astonishment when he told me he had caught a male specimen of *Cigaritis brunnea* in late September 1999 in a forest clearing in the Chirinda Forest near the Swynnerton Memorial in SE Zimbabwe. He described this experience in an article entitled "Chirinda Forest and a tale of *Spindasis brunnea*" in *Metamorphosis*, Vol 11, No.2, June 2000. Surprisingly, in early October 2008, on a follow up trip with Dave, Phil and Jane McDermott to the Chirinda Forest, I was fortunate to net a female *C brunnea* at the same spot that Dave had caught his specimen- nine years earlier. I donated this specimen to Dave so he could have a matching pair of this rare butterfly.

The collection was recently purchased by Jeremy Dobson and all the specimens are currently being reset by Martin Lunderstedt at the standard half way mark up the pin!

Anyone who knew Dave couldn't forget his flawless use of unnecessarily large words to which most of us certainly did not know the meaning thereof. What a splendid specimen, he would claim as he examined his butterfly collection. His love of the natural world was infectious, able to name any bird, bug or beast he came across during our adventures in the outdoors. He travelled to every corner of Southern Africa in search of his beloved butterflies and his sons and many lepidopterists were privileged to have shared many of these experiences with him.

A more hospitable host and gentlemen you will never meet. He applied this logic to life – cherishing his friends, family, dogs and butterflies more than meaningless belongings. Even in the face of his illnesses, Dave was able to pass on wisdom – he would, without fail, until the very end, reassure his friends and family that he is doing OK and that life carries on. Never moaning, never showing fear. Dustin recalls that he always made time to give his granddaughters a hug, reading them a story or showing them the birds in the garden. He told his family that they shouldn't fear death, but rather fear a life not lived. His motto was “don't wait for things to get better, life will always be complicated. Learn to be happy right now otherwise you'll run out of time”.



Dave was well known for his cooked breakfasts which were a great joy to all after the party the night before

Dave was brave throughout his battle with cancer and dementia and never complained, but instead, was always grateful to the nurses and the caring support he received at hospital and particularly at home from Shelia, his home carer.

Andrew Mayer records that Dave was a gentleman – one of the really good guys. Although the sadness of his passing on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2018 will ease with time, the joy and memory of knowing him will last forever. We who were honoured to have known David will remember him as a kind, eloquent, loving family man who appreciated the exquisite beauty of a butterfly's wings.

Go well David and rest in peace

**Owen Garvie**

## TRIBUTES TO DAVE FROM COLLEAGUES AND FRIENDS

### **Hermann Staude**

Dave was one of those incredibly hospitable charismatic people, whom I will miss very much. For many years we exploited his hospitality by having our LepSoc Africa council meetings at his place. Meeting there was one of the highlights of my tenure as LepSoc president. The moment you arrived, Dave was there to greet you and make sure you parked in a safe place and this hospitality continued all evening with a well organised venue, plenty of drinks and snacks, and above all being treated by Dave's pleasant demeanour. I think in his unobtrusive way he provided coherence to those many council meetings, for which LepSoc should be forever grateful to him.

### **Bennie & Andre Coetzer**

André and I have also had the privilege of spending time (too little) with Dave. From the first time we met him on the Fairland koppie in Johannesburg, through a number of trips to notorious places like Mphaphuli Cycad Reserve in Venda, Lesotho, Lynnwood, Ndumo, to mention only a few. He gladly shared any information he could, including his contacts with Mondi so that we could use their facilities to explore many forests and hillsides in the Eastern Cape.

Dave was ever the gentlemen, well spoken but always with some humour. I even had the privilege of Dave assisting our company with marketing documents and published articles – his polished English made my poor English shine in ways I would never have been able to!

We were very saddened by his passing but will always remember him, especially during our butterfly evenings.

### **Dave Edge**

The closest contacts I had with Dave were during many council meetings, some of which were held at his house. His contributions to council deliberations were always constructive and he gilded his comments with humour and practical insight. He and Wendy often accommodated me during those visits to Jo'burg and they were gracious and helpful hosts.

During my time as Metamorphosis Editor I became aware of the excellent articles Dave had written and also learnt of his many collecting exploits through the pen of writers such as Steve Woodhall. But perhaps his greatest gift to lepidopterology was to introduce us all to the joys of Allesveloren Fine Old Vintage Port!