

HOWE, ELIZABETH ANNE ('LIZ') (1959 - 2019), ecologist

Name: Elizabeth Anne Howe
Date of birth: 1959
Date of death: 2019
Spouse: Mike Howe
Child: Megan Howe
Child: Gwenllian Howe
Parent: Robert Pulford
Parent: Margaret Pulford (née Davis)
Gender: Female
Occupation: ecologist
Area of activity: Nature and Agriculture
Author: Catherine Duigan

Liz Howe was born on 27 October 1959 in Kingstanding in the West Midlands, one of two children of Robert Pulford, an electrical engineer, and his wife Margaret (née Davis). She had one brother, Robert.

She attended Aldridge Grammar School in Walsall (1971-78) and went on to Queen Elizabeth College, University of London, where as an undergraduate studying mammalian physiology she won the Cheesman prize for physiology and she studied tortoises in Greece and France. Subsequently her PhD at Bangor University (1981-85) was on the physiology of the ocellated skink, a lizard found in Italy, Greece and Malta. At Bangor she met fellow PhD student Mike Howe, an entomologist. They married in 1989 and worked together on a Jersey Zoo project on Angonoka tortoises in Madagascar. After the birth of their two daughters, family holidays generated a trail of rare invertebrate records, and they both developed careers in nature conservation in Wales.

As a talented naturalist, Liz Howe began working for the Nature Conservancy Council (1986-91) based at Bangor, surveying sites and then preparing conservation site management plans. She was appointed species team leader and herpetologist in the newly formed Countryside Council for Wales in 1991 and continued in that role at Natural Resources Wales until her death. She was author of two chapters on the amphibians and reptiles of Anglesey in *A New Natural History of Anglesey*, published by The Anglesey Antiquarian Society and Field Club (1990).

Howe's primary conservation legacy is represented by the critically acclaimed book *Habitats of Wales: A Comprehensive Field Survey, 1979-1997*, published by University of Wales Press (2010) of which she was co-author. For 10 years from 1987, she managed the survey teams that mapped vegetation across lowland landscapes in Wales. The results were combined with similar information for upland habitats to produce this book which provides the scientific foundation for strategic terrestrial conservation management in Wales. Developed before geographic information systems, the habitat maps produced were a pioneering spatial approach and maximised the applicability of the data. They contributed to the identification of potential sites of special scientific interest and helped to define tracts of land that are suitable for public access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. They increased our understanding of habitat fragmentation and species distribution. The habitat maps will also provide a basis for monitoring changes in the rural environment of Wales over the 21st Century and beyond. A specific study assessed changes in the extent and fragmentation of heathland and other semi-natural habitats between 1920-22 and 1987-88 in the Llŷn Peninsula. Howe was also a co-author of a review of the biological components of Sites of Special Scientific Interest in Wales which also considered the network potential of the protected areas.

Working with Chester Zoo, Howe led a successful captive breeding and re-introduction project to re-instate rare Sand Lizards at suitable coastal sand dune sites in Wales, locations where they had occurred historically but at which they had become extinct. Lizards were released in Talacre Warren, north Wales, and Ynyslas, part of the Dyfi National Nature Reserve, mid Wales. She also led a similar project at Presthaven Sands, Gronant Dunes and Talacre Warren to create appropriate habitat for the rare Natterjack Toad. This project has been so successful that the site has now become a donor of Natterjack spawn to re-establish other locations.

Howe advised on species conservation measures that were incorporated into Wales's first agri-environment scheme, implemented in 1992 by the Countryside Council for Wales. She also developed a very influential grants programme which supported positive collaborations with non-government organisations and wildlife charities and generated a large nature conservation volunteer network, including citizen scientists. This programme included the first ever lichen apprenticeship scheme to record and monitor the abundance of this lower plant group in Wales. Howe led the production of the first biodiversity action plans for species in Wales protected under the EC Habitats and Species Directive. She also helped with

the publication of the Red Data Lists of vascular plants, bryophytes and lichens which included an assessment of the threats facing them. Working with colleagues across the UK, she was more recently involved in assessing the potential ecological impact of ash dieback.

At the Countryside Council for Wales, Howe's cogent and scientifically based advice supported nature conservation operations in Wales, reached Ministerial level within Welsh Government and informed UK level initiatives through the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. In addition, as an excellent judge of character and talent, she attracted expert and loyal team members who shared her commitment to halt biodiversity loss and all enjoyed working with her.

At home, she and her husband restored a section of limestone pavement on their smallholding on Anglesey which became part of the Y Bonc, Marian-glas, Site of Special Scientific Interest, notified for its limestone grassland and heath community.

Howe's story would not be complete without recording her desire to increase access to music for young people. She was involved with the Friends of Gwynedd Youth Music for more than 10 years, including service as a committee member and secretary. As a keen amateur euphonium player, she also supported Beaumaris Brass Band, and in 2018 her fundraising efforts helped to make it possible for the youth band to attend the European Brass Band Championships.

Liz Howe was passionate about the environment of Wales and leaves a comprehensive environmental description of it. In addition, she cultivated a generation of habitat and species specialists dedicated to its care. For the benefit of the environment, she shared her depth of knowledge with conviction, clarity, diplomacy and good humour, while her efforts to increase access to music benefitted her local community.

Liz Howe died of cancer in Ysbyty Gwynedd, Bangor on 31 March 2019, aged 59, and she was cremated at Bangor Crematorium on 10 April. Her ashes rest in a wild part of Anglesey.

Author

Catherine Duigan

Sources

Information from family and colleagues

T. H. Blackstock, E. A. Howe, J. P. Stevens, C. R. Burrows, P. S. Jones, *Habitats of Wales: a comprehensive field survey, 1979-1997* (Cardiff 2010)

Further reading

The Guardian: [Liz Howe Obituary](#), viewed 6 July 2022

Elinor Gwynn, 'Liz Howe 1959-2019: ysgrif goffa,' *Barn*, 677 (Mehefin 2019), p. 42

BBC: [Last Word](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Liz Howe](#)

Additional Links

Wikidata: [Q64373642](#)

Published date: 2022-07-06

Article Copyright: <http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/> 

The Dictionary of Welsh Biography is provided by The National Library of Wales and the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies. It is free to use and does not receive grant support. A donation would help us maintain and improve the site so that we can continue to acknowledge Welsh men and women who have made notable contributions to life in Wales and beyond.

Find out more on our [sponsorship page](#).

