

# GUEST EDITORIAL

## Nicholas Gould 1941-2014 – an appreciation

Nick Gould, who edited *International Zoo News* between 1989 and 2010, has died. Few who knew the magazine during his tenure would deny that he was, by some considerable distance, its greatest editor. He inherited *IZN* when it was inconsistently produced, and lacking in quality. During his editorship, he brought an integrity and a reliability to the publication, nurturing a group of both regular and occasional writers, commissioning articles of depth, and, crucially, editing those articles with skill and sensitivity, while at the same time contributing his own beautifully-composed editorials and reviews. He conjured a journal that was, for the period of his tenure, essential for anyone with a true interest in zoos, be they amateur or professional.

Nick's background was not in the zoo world. An Oxford-educated classicist, he dabbled with school teaching (by his own admission without a great deal of success), before training as a librarian. It was in this capacity that he first knew John Aspinall, employed as he was to organise and catalogue the extensive library that Aspinall had gathered. Having also worked as a tutor for one of Aspinall's children, he was, perhaps, an obvious choice to take over the editorship of *International Zoo News* – owned by Aspinall - when, in the late 1980s, Peter Bunyard stood down from that position.

Nick brought many skills to his editing. At a time when technology was revolutionising the way in which a small publication could be put together, he was a keen early adopter of such technology. He was, too, a pedantic stickler for good writing, and would work tirelessly to elevate the prose that he received: he and I communicated, at length, about the extent to which one should use commas (he was fairly liberal in their application) or italics (possible to be *over* used, he thought), about the spelling of “raccoon” (or should it be “racoon”?), about the relative merits of “sealion” or “sea lion”. He knew that most readers would not notice such nice distinctions – but he noticed, and he knew that such precision mattered. It was perhaps because he worked so hard to shape the material he received that the magazine achieved such quality under his aegis; his alterations, additions and refinements always managed to make those who wrote for him look better than they might otherwise have done – surely, the mark of an excellent editor. His aesthetic eye should not be underestimated, either: during his reign, the magazine always looked good as well, consistently laid out, with

an eye for presentational detail. He was always seeking to take the magazine forward, bringing in new regular sections, nurturing new writers, thinking, constantly, about the way in which the publication was presented. His position was, theoretically, a part-time post, but he brought to his role a dedication and a focus on excellence that required a full-time commitment. From his first edition, in the summer of 1989 (feature articles from Leif Blomqvist writing about snow leopards, Richard O’Grady writing about Glasgow Zoo, and Clinton Keeling writing about Clinton Keeling), to his last in December 2010 (in which there was a piece on ‘diet-based training at Phoenix Zoo’, as well as Gie Robeyns writing on dolphinarium of Benelux, and an article by me about the zoos of Northern France), Nick endeavoured, always, to make the magazine the very best that it could be.

I first met Nick when he had been in post for a short while. I was a university student, just beginning to realise that there were other people out there who were intrinsically interested in zoos. It is easy, perhaps, in the age of the internet, to forget how easy it was for those of relatively arcane interests to feel isolated in the recent past. Discovering that a magazine such as *International Zoo News* existed was exciting enough. Realising that its editor lived in the small town of Angmering, close to my childhood home, was even more thrilling. To be invited for lunch by that editor, to meet him and spend the afternoon with him, and to go on to become a good friend, was to open up a world that, hitherto, I had not known to exist – a world of those who lived outwith the zoo world, but who observed that world with knowledge, passion, and genuine love. Nick acted as a hub for zoo obsessives, be they from Hamburg, Glasgow, Staten Island, or all points in between. Ironically, perhaps, the zoo obsessives for whom the magazine catered – alongside the zoo professionals whose good opinion Nick sought and earned – were a group into which Nick never fully fitted. His interest in and knowledge of the natural world was enormous, but not all-consuming, and I think some possibly misread this as his being a little superior, a little detached. The truth was the absolute opposite. Possibly the only occasion on which I saw Nick truly angry was when a well-known zoo enthusiast made a dismissive comment about people who “lived in council houses”; he deplored the snobbery implicit in that comment, because he himself had no such snobbery. He was endlessly fascinated by people, and he liked those people as well.

In many ways Nick was an outsider. Often socially awkward, he was not somebody who enjoyed, easily, the company of large numbers of people, and he could appear to be diffident and reserved. After he had read Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, he wrote to me that he “detected elements of Aspergerness” in himself, but while he had an obsession with ordering and cataloguing, and could sometimes reject the unfamiliar (I spent a quarter of a century trying, without success, to persuade him to read some of the

contemporary novelists that I thought were worthy of his attention alongside the literary loves of his life, Hardy, Dickens and Austen), his throwaway comment is a long way from being the whole story. In many ways, his diffidence was simply a facade, and beneath it he was a warm and engaging friend. That warmth and engagement showed itself most easily on the page: Nick was a wonderful writer, and his skill with words made him a superb correspondent. He was also a generous correspondent, writing with real affection on a variety of topics: zoos, of course, and the zoo people who he found endlessly fascinating (and occasionally puzzling), but books too, world events, mythology, the etymology of words (a real interest of his), education, and everything in between. Latterly, his life in Orkney, his land, and his work on that land, as well as the community of which he was a part, all came to dominate his letters: he was proud of his ability to build a dry-stone wall (or 'dike'), and of the prizes he won for his cooking in local competition.



Nick with his favourite cat, Hugo, Summer 2013. Photo: Fiona Gould

And while he was, initially, a little shy, Nick could also be very good company. I had the pleasure of making many zoo visits with him, in England and Scotland,

and also on mainland Europe. He approached such visits with the wide-eyed enthusiasm of a child. I remember with real fondness his reaction to a coypu exhibit at Antwerp Zoo. Other, more jaded, zoo enthusiasts may have found little of interest in such a familiar species, but he was enchanted, recognising that wonder could be found in any creature. He was also a fantastically unreconstructed zoo visitor, in many regards. If an animal could be stroked, he wanted to stroke it. If there were some grass, or some branches, that could be fed to a herbivore, he would be doing so. His zoo visits were not frequent, but I like to think that on those occasions when he did see animals in captivity, he really did make the very most of the experience.

He was also a truly amusing writer – and those who did not know him well may be surprised to hear that his sense of humour was so notable. He was endlessly witty, and the self-deprecation of his humour showed his awareness of the slightly fusty image he sometimes presented. Commenting on a mutual friend's business, he wrote of that business "offering everything that could be wanted by a lover of soul music – whatever that might be". He found great amusement in the eccentricities of others, and was funny but also affectionate in his ironic teasing of some mutual friends. His locking of horns with the late Clinton Keeling provided many highlights: he once wrote to him of his having "found in a litter bin in Westhampnett churchyard a little magazine called *Downs Country* with a short item from [Keeling's] pen....". It was classic Gould, in every respect: the hunting down of a bargain ("I have always made use of the things other people have discarded," he once wrote to me); the time spent pottering around in a rural churchyard (Nick was about as far from the hustle of twenty-first century life as it was possible to be), and the gentle mockery implied in his mentioning that the magazine had been found in a "litter bin". As one of his favourite authors, Jane Austen, asked in *Pride and Prejudice*, "For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbours, and laugh at them in our turn?": there was much such sport, and laughter, for Nick.

If you seek Nick's monument, look back at the 171 magazines that he edited. Observe the love and care with which they were put together. Read his editorials, which never betrayed the occasional struggle he had for inspiration, and which, instead, were always erudite and thought-provoking. And think, too, of the very real affection in which he was held by his many friends across the world – a good number of whom he had never met, but with whom he had instead enjoyed a full and lively correspondence. "The friends I have made in my years as editor have been foremost among the many rewards of the job," he wrote upon his retirement. Those friends, along with his wife Fiona and his son David, will miss him enormously.

*John Tuson*