

**Alexander Clifford Beaglehole OAM (26 August 1920–19 January 2002)**



Cliff Beaglehole, the youngest of three sons of Richard and Margaret Beaglehole, was born in Portland in south-west Victoria (A.C. Beaglehole, undated). For the first five years of his life he lived on his parents farm south of the Portland–Bridgewater road in the Parish of Trewalla. In 1926 the family moved to his parents other farm at Gorae West. Cliff's schooling was of short duration as he only attended the tiny Gorae State School, eight kilometres away, for six years. To reach school he rode each day on a pony along rough bush tracks. Possessing a natural curiosity and encouraged by his parents who were both interested in the natural world, it was during these formative years that his interest in natural history was initiated and stimulated. Thus began an interest in the natural world that was a life-long preoccupation.

The Beagleholes had as family friends the Holmes family at Gorae. Members of the Holmes family were very keen nature lovers who shared freely their knowledge of the bush. By the age of ten Cliff knew and could name scientifically about sixty species of orchids from the district. By the time Cliff left school he had a working knowledge of much of the local flora and fauna, but particularly of orchids and birds. On leaving school Cliff assisted his parents on their mixed farm at Gorae West to which the family had moved.

Orchids were of special interest to Murray Holmes and this interest transmitted itself to Cliff. Together they covered hundreds of kilometres on horse, pushbike and on foot searching for native orchids. He received encouragement also from Mrs. Floss Mellblom, another local orchid enthusiast, who executed coloured illustrations of the local orchid species to enable others to identify them more readily. One of Cliff's prized possessions was a set of illustrations that she presented to him. Encouraged by Murray and Floss, in 1934 at the age of fourteen Cliff began corresponding with and sending specimens for identification to W.H. Nicholls in Melbourne, one of the leading Australian orchid specialists of the time. Nicholls (1934) replied to what was possibly Cliff's first letter to him by stating 'Yes. I know a little about Orchids – no one knows everything.' The following year, on account of illness, Nicholls (1935) wrote to Cliff '.....Would you think me unkind to ask you to write to The Government Botanist (Mr. Rae) and forward all specimens to him for determination. The new 15000 Pound Herbarium is now opened and they have all the facilities there to give you full particulars of all the flora known. You will find them very obliging. ....' Thus began an association with the National Herbarium of Victoria that was to last for over sixty-five years.

Soon after leaving school Cliff started a systematic survey of the flora of the Portland region in his spare time, in the process doubling the number of species recorded for the area. On account of this activity he was christened 'King of the Gorae Forest' (A.C. Beaglehole, undated). By the early 1940s Cliff was corresponding with Rev. H.M.R. Rupp and supplying him with specimens of orchids. The years 1941 and 1942 were especially good seasons for orchids during which he discovered three previously undescribed species. His first paper 'Orchids of the Portland District' was published in the *Victorian Naturalist* 60: 23-25 (1943). In this paper were listed the scientific name, common name, date of first collection and the localities at which each species of orchid was collected. The compilation of species lists was a format that Cliff favoured throughout his career. Rev. Rupp suggested to Cliff that he should study all plants. Cliff readily accepted this challenge and was encouraged by the botanists including Jim Willis at the National Herbarium of Victoria to do so. He extended his botanical explorations in south-west Victoria in search of mosses, liverworts, fungi, lichens, and freshwater and marine algae. Together with Jim Willis he conducted field work in the Portland area, Grampians and elsewhere.

In September 1941 Cliff began to contribute to B E Carthew's column 'Nature Notes' in the 'Portland Observer.' Between 1941 and 1949 Cliff contributed almost monthly to this column, and a substantial proportion of about one hundred articles contain information on Cliff's observations.

In October 1949 Cliff married Hilda Mary Oakley. Life on the farm, which he purchased from his parents, was very busy with potato growing, an apple orchard and dairy cows, especially following the birth of two daughters, Valerie and Yvonne. The change from dairy cows to beef cattle made life a little easier for Cliff to pursue his natural history interests. Hilda always took a keen interest in, and often helped with, Cliff's various projects. Throughout these years on the farm Cliff continued his botanical explorations leaving much of the work on the farm during his absences to Hilda. In 1968 Cliff and the family moved to Portland to allow Cliff to devote more time to botany.

The 1950s appear to have been particularly busy. Long interested in native bees, Cliff sent his first specimen to the then National Museum of Victoria for identification. Entomologist Tarlton Rayment (1950a) replied: '..... Even your first catch is a New Record for the State.' In response to a request from Tarlton Rayment and detailed instructions on how to proceed, Cliff began studying the life histories and collecting local native bees in 1950. This work led to a very close collaboration between the two. Numerous detailed requests from Rayment followed, some of which required several days of work, or a constant vigil over a long period for a male or a female of a given species. On one occasion Cliff spent two days digging out one *Nomia australica* nest at Bats Ridge, the winding shaft and lateral cells extending almost 1.2 metres to a special moist clay. This work on bees culminated in 1953 with the publication by the Portland Field Naturalists' Club of the book '*Bees of the Portland Region*' by Tarlton Rayment. Altogether Rayment described thirty new species of native bees from Cliff's collections. Of these, three were named after Cliff, four commemorate Portland and two Gorae West. Subsequent to the publication of '*Bees of the Portland Region*', Cliff collected another twenty species for the Region. Rayment also made a study of the parasitic acarid mites found on the native bees sent by Cliff.

While working on the native bees Cliff extended his studies and started collecting wasps for Rayment. Rayment (1950b) wrote to Cliff: 'Keep your eyes skinned, Cliff, for greenish wasps [*Sericophorus*] about same size as the bees (*Parasphecodes wellingtoni*) in stumps, they make shafts in sandy ground, and I am anxious to get some from your district.' It was only in 1953 that Cliff found the first *Sericophorus* shafts along Cape Nelson Road. He worked on the shafts for fourteen days and subsequently found others at Mt Richmond and at Gorae West. Rayment (1951) wrote: 'Well, Cliff, it looks at first glance that you have been remarkably successful. There were six of the wasps, and one that I

have worked is new – and I think that there will be more.’ Cliff collected at least four new species of wasps, one of which was named after him. It is unfortunate that Rayment died before the work on native bees and wasps was concluded as it terminated the prospect of a book on the wasps of the Portland District by the two men. In addition to the bees and wasps, Cliff also collected the type of a new species of blow-fly (*Pollenia tragica* Rayment).

Cliff began a serious study of ants following a meeting early in 1954 with Father John McAreavey, a Master at Xavier College, Melbourne, who was preparing a catalogue of Australian ants (McAreavey, 1954). In July 1954 McAreavey wrote: ‘I have just completed naming of your ants, and as you guessed enjoyed it. They are in such good condition and so clearly set out that it is a pleasure and an interest to go through them.’ In October 1955 McAreavey wrote: ‘You got a nice lot [of ants] –I make it 118 different species representing nearly all the subFamilies.’ In addition to new records for Victoria, according to McAreavey, apparently twelve of the ants collected by Cliff represented undescribed species. Unfortunately Cliff had no further contact with McAreavey once the latter left Xavier College. Once again a very fruitful collaboration had terminated prematurely for Cliff.

Cliff’s interest in birds was encouraged by people such as Les Chandler and Noel Learmonth. The latter, who published *Birds of the Portland District*, indicated that the book ‘contains many species that would not have been recorded but for his [Cliff’s] field observations, indeed the author would not care to have attempted the book without having the ornithological work of Cliff Beauglehole to draw on.’ (Learmonth, 1967). Together with Hilda and other helpers in 1951 he started to collect and record sea birds washed up on the wild storm-lashed 50 kilometre coast of Discovery Bay. The carcasses of birds not collected were deposited behind the first dune to ensure that they were not counted on subsequent beach patrols. Between 1951 and 1963 almost 5000 carcasses were collected by Cliff and his helpers. In one day during August 1959 Cliff and Hilda collected 950 bird carcasses (Corrick, 1971). The flesh was allowed to decompose naturally on wire racks erected on top of the hay shed on the Beauglehole farm. It is said that sometimes it was possible to smell the Beauglehole farm before actually seeing it! Skins and clean skeletons of numerous birds were donated to the National Museum of Victoria and other Australian museums and to Harvard University, the United States of America. This work extended knowledge of the sea birds visiting our shores, and included several new records of species visiting Australia (Corrick, 1971).

In 1957 a group of members of the Victorian Field Naturalists Club of Victoria visited Portland, amongst them the conchologist Charles J Gabriel. Gabriel was hoping to find someone locally to collect tiny land snails for him. Needless to say Cliff took up the challenge. In January 1958 Gabriel wrote: ‘Now old chap not in my wildest dreams did I anticipate an answer so quickly to my “S.O.S” for W-Vict Land Shells. It was excellent and please accept my many thanks for your efforts, ...’. Some years later Cliff continued to send molluscs to Fred and Jan Aslin in Mount Gambier.

During the 1950s Cliff, together with Fred Davies of Portland, started a systematic survey of the bone deposits in many of the limestone caves in south-west Victoria. This work arose out of concern at the damage being caused to the caves through destructive activities such as road works and the dumping of rubbish. As in many of his endeavours, Cliff obtained the support of local naturalists and in 1963 they started to excavate McEachern’s Death Trap Cave, a chimney cave about 1.2 metres in diameter and 15 metres deep. Several tons of sediments were hauled to the surface and sieved. In this hard physical labour Cliff was assisted by his wife and daughters and collectively they spent hundreds of hours on the project. The identifiable remains of over 2000 animals were recovered and some of the material dated back 5,000 years to the Pleistocene. The highlight of the deposit was the discovery of the remains of a Tasmanian Tiger (Carthew, 1964). In 1964-5 Norman Wakefield became involved in the excavation and assessment

of the material (Wakefield, 1967). Study of this material added greatly to the knowledge of the earlier fauna of the region.

During the 1960s and 1970s Cliff extended his travel visiting Lord Howe Island twice, the Darwin region of the Northern Territory twice, Central Australia seven times and the Kimberley Region of Western Australia four times. In addition to plants, Cliff also collected skinks, geckoes, frogs, lizards, molluscs in Central and Western Australia. However, it was in Victoria that Cliff concentrated his efforts and there is scarcely a road or track in Victoria on which he did not travel at least once.

Cliff received financial support in 1968 from the Royal Botanic Gardens Research Trust Melbourne, a Trust associated with the Maud Gibson Trust, to survey the Grampians. Although the flora of the Grampians was thought to be reasonably well documented, there was a belief that many additional records awaited discovery. This was confirmed by Cliff's studies. The Grampians study was followed by funding from government agencies (mainly the National Parks Service and the Land Conservation Council of Victoria) to subsidise the survey of East Gippsland and other areas of Victoria, and from the Utah Foundation towards a survey of the alpine areas. In his survey work Cliff also received some financial and other support from the Western Victorian Field Naturalists' Clubs Association, from individual clubs, other organisations and individuals. In time the whole of Victoria was surveyed. The results of Cliff's work was published by the Land Conservation Council of Victoria in the form of conservation recommendations. Cliff subsequently published checklists for the entire state in a series of thirteen reports under the title *The distribution and conservation of vascular plants in Victoria*.

Cliff had a very discerning eye especially when it came to detecting differences or unusual forms and missed very little in the field. In a letter supporting Cliff's nomination for the Australian Natural History Medallion, Williams (1967) wrote 'Many of these mosses are almost microscopic in size and indeed I find that I cannot identify many of these without the use of a microscope but Cliff identifies these lowly plants in the field – and he will be 95% right!!' It has not been unusual for many years, and sometimes decades, to elapse before a taxon that Cliff had identified as different was recognised formally and described by a botanist. He seldom resorted to using keys to identification but relied instead on visual recognition and his prodigious memory and ability to recall diagnostic details. In the field when preparing to conduct his surveys, Cliff would plan his collecting sites carefully and ensure that each different community and habitat was visited. On reaching a site, he would walk around and collect and record taxa until he could find no additional taxa before moving on to his next site. During his years of field work he amassed a huge collection of specimens and his collecting numbers exceeded 95,000. Cliff very generously donated the bulk of his private herbarium to the National Herbarium of Victoria many years ago, but he also sent specimens for identification to botanists in a number of other herbaria and his specimens are to be found in each main Australian herbarium and in several overseas. Cliff is the largest single contributor of specimens to the National Herbarium of Victoria and it is unlikely that his record will be bettered. In the case of Victoria, Cliff intended that his specimens would serve as vouchers for his species lists and he attempted to collect each taxon present within the minor 10'×10' grid 'squares' then employed for recording distribution within the state. Many of the specimens were of necessity sterile, but nevertheless they are an important record and often are the only record of the taxon in question from that part of Victoria or indeed from Victoria. Often it is a Beaglehole specimen that alerts one to the existence of an interesting or unusual taxon at a particular site and enables one to re-visit the site. Cliff had tremendous drive, energy and commitment, working from dawn to dusk in the field collecting and recording and half of the night documenting and processing his collections.

Having witnessed the destruction of native habitats in his youth, Cliff was always very environmentally aware and with the passing of the years this awareness intensified. Deeply concerned by the disappearance of natural communities due to agricultural and

urban developments, he was actively involved with a number of other naturalists in many campaigns for environmental conservation. Cliff was one of the foundation members of the Western Victorian Conservation Committee, a sub-committee of the Portland Field Naturalists Club, that was established to spearhead for the fight for the preservation of the Little Desert. The Committee was active in bringing to the attention of successive governments the need to change practices of land management. He was also instrumental in the preservation of the Mount Richmond and the Lower Glenelg National Parks. Although not opposed to the Portland Aluminium smelter, he was opposed to it being sited on the rich wet coastal heathland of Point Danger, arguing that the smelter could readily be moved and built on disturbed pasture land one kilometre inland. Cliff had a long-standing interest in a number of sites in or near Portland such as Fawthrop Lagoon where his contribution is commemorated by a walking track that bears the name 'Cliff's Walkway.' Cliff also led a campaign to prevent McDonald's Family Restaurants from occupying a prime corner site in Portland that resulted in the City Council re-zoning the land and setting it aside permanently as a park. He was concerned not only by the incursion of alien exotics into every plant community in Victoria but also by the spread of native species such as *Acacia longifolia* (Andrews) Willd. subsp. *sophorae* (Labill.) Court and *Pittosporum undulatum* Vent. that were spreading rapidly beyond their former natural ranges and having an adverse environmental effect in every respect as detrimental as that of the worst introduced species. Cliff also lamented the loss of much natural bush to pine and latterly eucalypt plantations.

Always very generous with his time, Cliff was always willing to assist visitors to his area conducting field work, or to give precise directions to one of his collecting localities or provide supplementary information. Whenever a new or challenging piece of field research was required in SW Victoria, Cliff rose to the occasion and responded. Such was his industry, application and enthusiasm, that Cliff invariably surpassed with his contribution the expectations of the person(s) who made the request, more often than not overwhelming them with specimens or records of observations. With an insatiable thirst for knowledge of the natural world, Cliff was more or less the complete naturalist, a rarity in this day of increasing specialisation. What makes Cliff's contributions prior to 1968 when the family moved to Portland more remarkable is that in addition to devoting so much energy to his natural history interests, he also had to earn a living operating his farm although in this latter enterprise Hilda played a crucial role.

Cliff always relied initially on specialists to identify his collections. In the case of the specialist entomologists with whom he collaborated, each predeceased Cliff by many years and consequently the collaborative projects lapsed prematurely which would have been a great disappointment for Cliff. Unfortunately the government herbaria that Cliff turned to for assistance were basically unable to cope with the quantity of specimens and meet his deadlines which were often incompatible with institutional priorities. I recall vividly receiving several consignments of specimens from Cliff. Unlike most other collectors who sent in an occasional box of specimens, Cliff would send in cubic metres of specimens.

Cliff was a foundation member of the Portland Field Naturalists Club and of the Western Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association. Always an active member of the Portland Field Naturalist Club, he encouraged many country naturalists to develop an interest in their environment and to monitor and document the vegetation. Cliff became a very important figure and an inspiration to many of these naturalists who sent specimens to him for identification or sought his advice. Cliff received Life Membership of the Portland Field Naturalist Club in 1962 in recognition of his contributions. In 1982 he was elected an Honorary member of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria in recognition of 40 years of continuous membership. Always very active, he was a member of many other Clubs, Associations and Societies.

In 1971 Cliff was awarded the Australian Natural History Medallion for services to

natural history. In 1984 he was awarded the ‘Medal of the Order of Australia’ (OAM) for his services to botany, conservation and ornithology.

Much of what Cliff accomplished would not have been possible without the support of Hilda. It was very fitting that The Portland Field Naturalists Club recognized her contribution and presented her with a Life Membership certificate on 10 October 1962 with the following words inscribed; ‘presented to Mrs. Hilda Beauglehole who in so large a measure has assisted her husband in the splendid work he has achieved.’

Cliff’s legacy will live on through his collections which constitute a huge resource from which future generations will continue to derive benefits, his publications, and from his vision in campaigning actively for several natural areas to be set aside as national parks.

Cliff is survived by his wife, two daughters, seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

### Taxa named after Cliff:

<b>Algae</b>	<i>Helminthocladia beaugleholei</i> Womersley <i>Nitella tasmanica</i> Muell. ex A.Braun subsp. <i>gelatinifera</i> R.D.Wood var. <i>beaugleholei</i> R.D.Wood
<b>Moss</b>	<i>Phascum beaugleholei</i> I.G.Stone
<b>Vascular plants</b>	<i>Bassia beaugleholei</i> Ising (now a synonym of <i>Sclerolaena diacantha</i> (Nees) Benth.) <i>Caladenia beaugleholei</i> D.L.Jones (now a synonym of <i>Arachnorchis flavovirens</i> (G.W.Carr) D.L.Jones & M.A.Clem.) <i>Epilobium brunnescens</i> (Cockayne) P.H.Raven & Engelhorn subsp. <i>beaugleholei</i> K.R.West & P.H.Raven <i>Lobelia beaugleholei</i> Albr. <i>Prasophyllum beaugleholei</i> Nicholls (now a synonym of <i>Corunastylis nuda</i> (Hook.f.) D.L.Jones & M.A.Clem.) <i>Solanum beaugleholei</i> D.E.Symon <i>Stylidium beaugleholei</i> J.H.Willis <i>Utricularia beaugleholei</i> R.J.Gassin <i>Villarsia umbricola</i> Aston var. <i>beaugleholei</i> Aston
<b>Lichen</b>	<i>Heterodea beaugleholei</i> Filson
<b>Bees</b>	<i>Exoneura cliffordiella</i> Rayment <i>Hylaeus cliffordiellus</i> Rayment <i>Megachila cliffordii</i> Rayment
<b>Wasp</b>	<i>Serocophorus cliffordii</i> Rayment

### Major publications

- Beauglehole, A.C. (1943). Orchids of the Portland District. *Victorian Naturalist* **60**, 23–25.
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In addition, Cliff contributed about 100 articles that were published under the title 'Nature Notes' in the Portland Observer edited by B.E. Carthew during the years 1941–1949, and numerous articles to the Australian Conservation Foundation Portland Chapter Newsletter and to the Western Victorian Conservation Committee Newsletter.

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