

The Lives of Creatures Obscure, Misunderstood, and Wonderful: A Volume in Honour of Ken Aplin 1958–2019

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He was always a modest man, but Ken was a genius and the toughest man we knew. He was also extraordinarily generous of spirit. The way he gave of himself, his time, and his hard-won stores of knowledge, was legendary amongst his friends and colleagues. We admired him and we loved him. Ken was a world-renowned comparative anatomist, vertebrate systematist, palaeontologist, and zooarchaeologist. He was a problem solver like few we've ever met, and a fieldworker and world traveller par excellence. Ken's personal and professional outlook embraced the whole world, in all its true facets and flavours, its complexities and eccentricities—he took the world, and all of us in it, as we came. His intellectual reputation extended well beyond Australia and was known to thousands of colleagues who may never have had the chance to meet him.

Ken was funny. It was a sense of humour that helped guide him in all situations, borne in part of never taking himself, or anything else whatsoever, too seriously. Ken belonged to that rare breed of truly grounded people. To say he didn't tend to stand on ceremony is to say the least. He preferred things practical and simple. He had little or no tolerance of honours. He took things as they were, not as they purported or professed or pretended to be. His refusal to kowtow to trend could come off as rather contrarian: he scoffed at anti-malarials and smart phones, even if most of the rest of us decided they were actually pretty useful! As a scientist, a common pattern for Ken would be to produce work of

the most extraordinary calibre, and then publish it in the most obscure possible places. He took a personal pride and pleasure in such things. We admired him for it, though it had the effect that his work often wasn't recognized as widely for its brilliance as it should have been. But Ken sought no glory, period. In proper Aussie style, he was a true champion of the battlers and the underdogs, wherever he found them. Even when it came to his study animals, the more despised they might be in the public eye, the more he loved them. Snakes? Good. Rats? Even better. And the bigger the better.

Ken received many accolades across a varied and deeply respected academic and professional career, which included serving as Curator of Herpetology at the Western Australian Museum and as a Research Scientist at the CSIRO. Among his honours were his appointments as Research Associate at the American Museum of Natural History in New York and the Smithsonian in Washington DC, as well as receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Australian Museum, an award very rarely bestowed. Especially important were Ken's lasting contributions to the conservation of wild landscapes and wild creatures, especially in Southeast Asia and New Guinea—he understood acutely that the world was a grander place than any of us can realize in our short time here. Despite his humility, we in the scientific community could see Ken's greatness, we recognized it, and hope to honour it in a small way with this volume. We have tried to capture the truly dizzying breadth and depth of Ken's knowledge and interests with the contributions presented

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