

## In Memoriam

### **William James (Bill) Merilees - (July 19, 1940 – June 18, 2025)**

William James (Bill) Merilees passed away unexpectedly after a brief illness surrounded by his family on June 18, 2025 in Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada.

Bill was born in Vancouver, BC in 1940, graduating from Magee High School in 1958 and from the University of British Columbia in 1964 receiving his BSc in Zoology and Biology. He received his MA in Outdoor Education from Colorado State University in 1974.

Bill's early life was spent exploring the natural areas around his home near the Fraser River and with his involvement in the Scouting movement. His interests were developed and fostered by many members of the early naturalist community and with his membership in the Vancouver Natural History Society, now Nature Vancouver, an organization that he belonged to for the rest of his life.

After graduating from UBC, Bill embarked on a trip around the world visiting dozens of countries and existing on less than \$1.00 a day. During his travels he worked as a stevedore, sheep shearer, coal miner and assistant archeologist for the famed Dr. Louis Leakey in Kenya. At the end of his travels, Bill was offered a position as the Senior Biologist for ANARE, (*Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition*). Bill spent 13 months on Macquarie Island in the sub-Antarctic studying penguins, albatross and elephant seals for the Australian Government. For his early work on Australia's Antarctic Program Bill was awarded the Australian Antarctic Medalion and bestowed with the post nominals AAM.

In 1964, Bill met his wife June while traveling by ship between Hawaii and Fiji. They were married in Australia and returned to Canada in 1968.

Bill worked as a lab assistant at Selkirk College in Castlegar, BC and then, after a brief stint with Parks Canada in Waterton Lakes and Revelstoke, settled in Nanaimo BC in 1975 as an Interpretation Officer with BC Parks.

Taking early retirement in 1995, Bill pursued independent research into micromolluscs along the BC Coast. His research uncovered several species previously unknown to science. His lifetime of notes and extensive collection from along the breadth of the BC Coast was acquired by the Beaty Biodiversity Museum at UBC in 2022.

Bill was admired for his volunteer efforts always extolling a love for the natural environment and he worked tirelessly to enhance and protect valuable natural assets around Nanaimo including Saysutshun (Newcastle Island) and Buttertubs Marsh.

Bill will be fondly remembered for his willingness to share his knowledge with others. As a member of the Vancouver Natural Historical Society, Bill organized talks, events and led trips for club members on excursions to witness natural events like the return of the Brant Geese and the sea lions to Harmac. He organized visits to special areas like Haida Gwaii, the Alsek River, Columbia River, and Alberta Grasslands. He led world excursions to Antarctica, Australia, Borneo, India, Madagascar, and to the Galapagos Islands to name a few.

Bill wrote many publications on diverse aspects of the natural history of British Columbia including: *Newcastle Island: A Place of Discovery*, *Attracting Backyard Wildlife*, and an extensive rewrite of Chess Lyons', *Trees, Shrubs and Flowers to Know in British Columbia and Washington*.

Pre-deceased by his parents Welborne and Eva, Bill is survived by his sisters Janice and Heather, his wife of 56 years, June, children, Andrew, Fraser (Tanya), Stuart (Esmé), and Rowena, grandchildren Asia, Evangeline, Jacob, William, Adam and Sam, and great granddaughter Nova.

The community is invited to attend a Celebration of his life on Saturday, July 19, 2025 at the Bowen Park Auditorium in Nanaimo from 3pm – 4pm with refreshments to follow.