

David Measures

David Measures, who died on August 4 aged 73, expressed his lifelong love of natural history in hundreds of paintings and sketches, some of which are in the Natural History Museum in London as well as in private collections.



David Measures Photo: MAGGY MILNER

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Measures recorded the bird, mammal and plant life of Britain, but was known particularly for his images of butterflies. While most such artists strive for an almost photographic quality, Measures aimed for fluency and spontaneity, attempting to capture the essential character of his subject. Much of his work has the quality of a sketch book – delicate watercolours or pen drawings executed in the field and accompanied by contemporaneous notes recording details such as behaviour, location and weather conditions. He never worked in a studio, but always from life.

Although he would paint and draw anywhere he found himself, Measures was probably happiest recording the natural world around his early 16-century cottage at Southwell, Nottinghamshire, where he lived for the last 47 years of his life. In the tradition of a 19th-century artist and naturalist, he kept detailed field diaries.

In recent years he had also made regular visits to Cressbrook Dale, in the Derbyshire Peak District. Of the work he did there he said: "These [watercolours] are made directly without alterations, responding to the same set of features within my view according to the season, changes in weather or changes within oneself."

It is not infrequent to find I've laboured too long and end up with a too faithful representation. Then, in my last half an hour before I leave, I try at speed to paint a fresh response, a more economic version that retains the conviction whilst using a more bold and simple execution."

David Guy Measures, the son of a bank manager, was born on November 22 1937 and educated at Warwick School. As a boy he swam regularly in the Avon and enjoyed the use of a small boat provided by his parents, who did not discourage his adventures.

Always meticulous in his observations, he made many sketches of the local bird life while at the same time taking pains to identify the species' different songs. Each drawing would be accompanied by the birdsong in musical notation.

On leaving school, Measures studied for four years at Leamington Art School. He then took a teaching diploma at Bournemouth before embarking on a painting course at the Slade School of Fine Art.

Thereafter he made his living principally as a teacher. After a brief spell at Lancaster Art School, in 1964 he took up a post at Nottingham Art School, where he remained until retiring in 1992.

Among his early roles there was head of printmaking, and the acid used in the process so affected his heart and lungs that in 1972 he was forced to take a year out recuperating in the Lake District.

In retirement, Measures concentrated on his art. He exhibited both in Britain and abroad, but had no interest in self-promotion.

In the 1970s his work on butterflies was the subject of an episode (called *David's Meadow*) in David Bellamy's BBC Television series *Bellamy's Britain*.

Measures published two books illustrating his work with butterflies: *Bright Wings of Summer* (1976) and *Butterfly Season* (1984). Shortly before his death he completed another book, called *A Hidden Surprise*, about hobbies, the birds of prey.

David Measures married, in 1963, Christine Cummins, also an artist. She survives him with their daughter and son.