

# CLUB FOR WHICH NATURE IS WAY OF LIFE

**WILDLIFE** enthusiast Beatrice Turner gets just as excited about new discoveries now as she did when she helped set up Bishop's Stortford Natural History Society, 50 years ago.

As the society's oldest member, 78-year-old Miss Turner has spotted many uncommon flowers in the district, in addition to the part she has played in the life of the club.

And now, Miss Turner, of Woodfield Terrace, Stansted, is to be guest of honour at the society's 50th anniversary dinner in November.

President Mr Ralph Gilbert said this week: "The natural habitat is changing all the time and people like Miss Turner can remember when it was very different."

The natural history society's 30 members all have one thing in common — an avid interest in learning more about the flora and fauna in the district and throughout the world, through lectures and slides.

Meetings in summer months are spent in the countryside, spotting unusual flowers and wild animals, trees, and grasses and birds.

Some members are currently involved in plotting a habitat by the old Dunmow railway line at Little Easton.

They have done similar plotting for the past two years to compare how the environment is changing.

Said Mr Gilbert: "The members are also chang-

ing. At one time people joined us with a wealth of knowledge about wildlife. Now more people are coming to gain knowledge themselves.

"There is a lot of interest in natural history.

"We're hoping to set up a workshop this winter for people to learn to identify different wild flowers under microscopes.

"Many flowers look quite similar and can only be identified under close inspection."

One of the most recent summer trips was to explore farmer Ted Harvey's farm at Wickham Hall, Bishop's Stortford, where Miss Turner said



● TWO of the longest-serving members of Bishop's Stortford Natural History Society (left), Miss Beatrice Turner and her brother Harry, pictured with the president of the society, Mr Ralph Gilbert.

Observer August 22, 1985.

By ANNE THORPE

much of the original habitat had disappeared over the years with the removal of hedges.

She said: "When farmers used to have hedges dividing their fields there were far more primroses and cowslips. But with bigger machinery the fields have got larger.

"When hedges divided the fields crops were never knocked over by the wind and rain, as we have seen this year. They were more shielded."

Miss Turner, who was born and brought up in Cradle End, near Little Hadham, said her interest in nature started

when she was five when her brother Harry found a Dusky Geranium.

"It was a beautiful dark red colour and so beautiful we used to go back to the spot in Green Street for many years to see it," she recalls.

Miss Turner, who became a pupil teacher at Little Hadham School when she was 14½, went to the second meeting of Bishop's Stortford Natural History Society in 1935.

"I was teaching at St. Michael's School at the time and many of the teachers were interested in science and nature.

"Wild flowers had always been a great part of my life," recalled Miss Turner.

In 1917 she remem-

bers spotting the first Rosebay Willow Herb which had been brought over by the Americans in 1914.

Over the years Miss Turner and many other members of the society have seen wild bee orchids growing on roadsides and in woods in the Hatfield Broad Oak area.

She has also seen a rare Ladies Slipper Orchid.

One of the things that Miss Turner misses is the lack of meadows where, she said, orchids, dandelions and oxslips were common.

She said cowslips were still to be seen on Castle Mound, Bishop's Stortford.

Members of the socie-

ty, which meets at Apton Road Day Centre, still see ladies smock, mallow violets, both blue and white and venus looking glass and sometimes find chicory and salsify in the area.

Miss Turner's brother, Harry, aged 76, said: "When the motorways came to the area we were against them.

"But now we are seeing that wildlife is blooming by them because they are places where people do not walk."

Many members have one particular specialist subject which they can teach others during their summer rambles and winter discussions.

Said Mr Gilbert: "I think more people are becoming interested in natural history and are more aware of the need not to pick flowers in order to retain the wild flowers we have."