DECEMBER 2017 | Issue 12

New Nature

SPECIES FOCUS

Laura Butler presents our old friend the robin

Page 22

THE COMEBACK OF OTTERS

Helina Hickey reveals the secret of their return to the River Don

Page 20

RESPONSIBLE SNORKELLING

Charlotte Marshall tells us how to be responsible when it comes to endangered species

Page 12

7 YEARS OF CAMERA SHAKE

Isabel Lewis tells us of the wonderful photographer David Plummer

Page 32

George Monbiot

Alex Pearce gets his views on the natural world, rewilding, politics, loneliness and much more

Forest School • Robins • The Wild Watch • Illustration • Photography • Island Hopping

Contents

Images: Seal, Tim Allsop; Forest, Georrgie Lamb; Lapwing, Campaign for National Parks.

On the Cover

Our wonderful cover shot this month was taken by Oscar Dewhurst.

Oscar is a 21-year old award-winning wildlife photographer from London. He has taken photos in locations ranging from the side of the A1 in London to photograph waxwings to the heart of the Peruvian Amazon to capture howler monkeys.

Find him on Twitter @OscarDewhurst and online at www.oscardewhurst.com

Images: Beach, Camila Quinteros Peñafiel; Shoveler Duck, Matt Livesey; Water, Wild Watch.

WELCOME TO

New Nature

It's December, the blushed tones of Autumn now but a fading memory and vibrant greens of Spring and Summer a soothing promise of things to come. Outside, the air resonates with the nasally honking call of migrant geese and our fields and hedgerows have been overtaken by thrushes from afar: by redwings, fieldfares and immigrant blackbirds. It is a time of cold, dulcet tones and unfavourable weather yes, but also a time of wonder. A time of splendid wildlife, thrilling vistas and unforgettable wild experiences.

This December marks a milestone for the team at *New Nature Magazine;* an event myself and the other editors have been looking forward to for some time. Yes, this month marks the end of one full year of *New Nature*. The end result? Twelve issues published, hundreds of topics covered, two major events attended and a reach that now extends far beyond what I, personally, had even dared hope for. Better still, however, is the fact that during our first year we have brought the views of almost one-hundred incredibly passionate young naturalists to an audience of thousands. Allowing them to have their say and discuss the topics which, as young environmentalists, interest them the most.

This issue, the final edition of 2017, continues along a similar, exciting vain. Here you will find talk of eco-friendly snorkelling with globally endangered species, right here in the UK; as well as evocative writing centred on the Hebrides, robins and wildfowl. Conservation is well represented too, in the form of a wonderful piece on otters by Helina Hickey; while youth nature, as ever, can be found in abundance. Brought to you on this occasion by *New Nature* stalwart Zach Haynes and newcomer Georgie Lamb.

We hope that you enjoy this issue as much as we have enjoyed producing it and very much hope that you will stick with *New Nature* through to the New Year and beyond. Big plans are afoot behind the scenes and with our team now back to full strength and raring to go, 2018 looks set to be another fantastic year for us as both a free, enjoyable magazine and a fledgling community of cracking young writers.

James Common
Managing Director

UK Blog Awards 2018

Help New Nature take 2018's blogger awards by storm

New Nature magazine has been nominated in two categories of this years UK Blog Awards: PR and Communications, and Green and Eco. In order to advance to the judges vote and make the final eight, we must first win the public vote. To do this, we need the help of you, our fabulous and reliable readers. We would appreciate votes in both categories – though Green & Eco takes precedence – and would be incredibly grateful if you would consider helping us out. To vote for New Nature follow this link: www.blogawardsuk.co.uk/ukba2018/entries/new-nature-magazine

Our founder and director, James Common, is also up for two awards as an individual contestant in this year's competition. These are the 'Social Influencer' and 'Green & Eco' categories. I'm sure James would be extremely grateful if, while voting for New Nature, you also cast a vote for him at: www.blogawardsuk.co.uk/ukba2018/entries/common-nature

A misty Cotswolds pic from @SazMills

A bold shorelark from Mark Fullerton @Markyfullerton

Check out this amazing red spider by @kaan_nature

Readers' Photographs

What a cute little Russian sparrow from @vovakakso

A fantastic robin shot by Daniel Evans @djewildlife

Send us yours!
editorial.newnature@gmail.com
or tweet us
@newnature_mag

What To Watch For In DECEMBER

Words by Elliot Dowding

Come December, the majority of deciduous trees will have dropped all of their leaves, so that the woods stand stark and sculptural against the grey winter sky. But there is still green to be found, besides the dark forms of planted conifers, such as our native yews and hollies which not only add colour to the landscape but provide shelter and food for many birds, mammals and invertebrates. Evergreen holm oaks (or *ilex*) may not be from around these parts, but their dense crowns of foliage and roughly-cracked bark are perfect for wintering insects, and consequently attract small birds like goldcrests to their branches.

As a defence against the cold and predators, and perhaps for social reasons too, many bird species roost in flocks outside of the breeding season. Gulls in particular can form spectacular, and often huge, roosts on inland water bodies – with wave after wave of calling gulls gliding in v-formation to the same local site each evening. If you take a telescope to a nearby roost you can try and count the numbers as they arrive, and scan the flock for unusual or rare species such as glaucous or Iceland gulls. If there isn't a reservoir near you then an evening trip to the town centre can be livened up by hundreds of pied wagtails swarming into roadside trees. This is quite a charming seasonal event and can make for interesting photography, or you could challenge yourself to find a grey wagtail amongst all the pied.

Despite the majority of invertebrates having either gone into hibernation or dying at the approach of winter, there are still a few hardy beasts crawling about in the frosty undergrowth. Take the oil beetles; of the five UK species, two are active as adults during the winter months, including the rugged and Mediterranean oil beetle. These large and glossy black beetles are quite beautiful and have a fascinating life cycle, they are also under threat and Buglife is running a survey which needs all and any records from the public, so if you spot one take a photo!

December, and winter in general, is the best time of year for seeing our many stunning duck species as they gather in flocks on lakes, estuaries and off the coast and as their numbers are boosted by migrants from the north. A winter's day birding by the sea (especially in Scotland) could be rewarded with flocks, or 'rafts', of duck such as goldeneye, scaup, goosander, common and velvet scoter or red-breasted merganser. Lakes inland may hold similar species as well as pochard, pintail, wigeon, teal, gadwall or even a sublime smew.

If you live in the north of England, Scotland, Wales or Ireland then you could set yourself a December challenge of seeing one, or both, of the coat-changing mammals. By this I mean either the rugged-terrain loving mountain hare, which sheds its grey summer fur for a suit of purest white in winter, or the more unusual and increasingly rare snow-white winter form of the stoat – called an ermine. Both species change colour as a defence against predators, so that they can remain unseen against a backdrop of snow. But with climate change heralding ever-milder winters and less and less snow, this strategy is becoming dangerous as their pale coats are rather obvious against bare ground.

WHERE TO VISIT

Don't let the cold winter months stop you from going outside as there are many exciting spectacles to see this month.

Words by Alice Johnson

Rainham Marshes, Essex

Escape from the busy urban surroundings and immerse yourself in this RSPB reserve that is situated by the River Thames. Originally a military firing range, the marshes are now protected and the area is a great place to see flocks of wildfowl in winter. There is also the chance of seeing birds of prey looking for food as they glide over the site – a short-eared owl or peregrine if you are lucky! With an accessible network of paths, and a visitor centre on site, it is a place where nature lovers can revel in the wildlife and warm up with a cup of tea before heading home. Species you might see include waders, such as redshank, little egret, snipe, dunlin, ringed plover and golden plover, along with a plethora of wildfowl, including wigeon.

Hickling Broad, Norfolk

Watch the winter's day end at the Stubb Mill Raptor Roost at the Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Hickling Broad, and marvel at the number of marsh harriers in your view. Another draw is the chance to watch common cranes out on the reserve from the viewing platform, along with the possibility of a sighting of a barn owl, hen harrier and merlin. Park in the visitor centre car park, then walk up the road to the viewing point to enjoy this winter spectacle, and remember to wrap up warm!

Aberystwyth Pier, Wales

It may seem like a strange place for wildlife watching but it is no secret that this pier is a roosting spot for thousands of starlings during the colder months of the year. Arrive before sunset to see these incredibly beautiful creatures perform an aerial display, to the joy of watchers, as they drift around in the sky. The safety in numbers philosophy is exhibited here as it helps reduce attacks from aerial predators. The chattering of starlings in a communal roost is an equally astonishing experience, and this communication is said to involve individuals exchanging information on good feeding sites they have found.

Hayle Estuary, Cornwall

This estuary, located in a picturesque part of Cornwall, is home to around 18,000 birds during cold winters. The thousands of individuals are beautiful to behold on their own, but viewed in this number they are an incredible sight. Winter wildfowl, such as teal and wigeon, are present in their hundreds, along with waders, including lapwing, dunlin, golden, grey and ringed plover, plus black-tailed godwit, and many others. There is even the chance of spotting a rarer species in amongst the crowds – the gull flocks can for example hold a glaucous gull on occasion. The site is looked after by the RSPB, and there is a hide located here, too.

Images: Rainham Marshes, Andy Roberts; Marsh Harrier, Jo Garbutt; Aberystwyth Pier, Bruce Ruston; Hayle Estuary, Luct Stevens.

SAY HELLO

EMAIL:
editorial.newnature@gmail.com

VISIT:
www.newnature.co.uk

TWITTER/FACEBOOK/INSTAGRAM:
@newnature_mag

SHORE CRAB

Carcinus maenas

Words by Elliot Dowding

Any child or adult (myself included), who quite sensibly enjoys exploring rock-pools on holiday, or is fortunate enough to live near the coast, will be familiar with the incredibly common and widespread shore crab. They are the most regularly encountered crustacean around British coasts other than shrimps and barnacles, and can be found under almost any rock, patch of seaweed or in any muddy estuary. Their numerousness and the ease with which they can be caught can make us rather blasé about them. This isn't helped by their unexceptional appearance, being the most bog-standard crab shape and colour (ranging from green through brown and dull red) possible.

Compared with finding a velvet swimming-crab, or edible crab or even a masked crab, which are all very exciting, coming across a shore crab just isn't something to write home about. Yet their ability to survive, nay thrive, in a range of aquatic environments and become one of the most successful invertebrates in an area is surely to be admired – even if it isn't always welcome.

Thanks to the busy shipping networks that thread around the globe, this plucky crustacean has established itself as an invasive alien in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and North and South America. It has been able to do this because of its ability to survive in a wide range of salinities (enabling it to spread up rivers) and temperatures (between 0 and 30°C). A female shore crab can also lay up to 185,000 eggs each breeding season, although the majority of these will be eaten.

It may be reviled as a threat to shellfish populations abroad, and seen as rather commonplace and unextraordinary at home, but I believe this little green crab has a very important role to play. It's very commonness, and how easy it is to find, catch, pick up and engage with is what makes it special. When it comes to getting children inspired by nature, so that they might one-day care enough about it to protect it, I think that regular close encounters with common species like robins, snails, flowers and crabs are crucial.

Many memories I have from my childhood, which I am sure are shared by some of you, include going crabbing from piers with a bucket, line and a lump of stinky old fish. Or turning over a clump of slimy seaweed to find a crab that for an eight-year old appeared huge, and then watching it scuttle around the bottom of a plastic bucket, marvelling at its stalked eyes flicking in and out and claws clipping angrily together.

For many children who get to go rock-pooling or crabbing, it is the prospect of holding in their hands one of these eight-legged, hard-shelled, feisty, snappy things that makes it so thrilling. They may not be the most exhilarating creature to a hardened naturalist, but when it comes to filling a child's head with the wonder and curiosity of the natural world, the humble shore crab is essential.

Responsible SNORKELLING with a globally ENDANGERED SPECIES

Words by Charlotte Marshall

As the boat hurtled across the waves away from St Martin's, in the Isles of Scilly, and I assessed the large bank of grey cloud in the distance, I wondered, as I often do when about to dive or snorkel in the British Isles, what on earth I was thinking. We had resigned ourselves to a damp late summer break of indoor activities when Anna from Scilly Seal Snorkelling found a miraculous break in the weather and took us out to snorkel with one of my favourite mammal species, the grey seal.

Image: Tim Allsop

Image: Anna Cawthray

For more information about seals in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, visit www.scillysealsnorkelling.com or www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk

Having secured my mask, snorkel and fins I slid into the sea, bracing myself for the surge of cold water in my wetsuit. We snorkelled in to the lee of one of the Eastern Isles, admiring the waving thong weed and other macroalgae suspended in the glowing green water. Suddenly, a sleek, dappled grey shape emerged, dominated by two gleaming black eyes surrounded by a face full of quivering whiskers. All cold was forgotten as the first curious grey seal of the day swam effortlessly up to the surface to inspect our fins.

The grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*) is a globally endangered species and we are very lucky to host 38% of the species' pup production here in the UK. Grey seals can dive to depths of 120m and hold their breath for 20 minutes (one of the most amazing physiological achievements in the animal kingdom), but are often seen hauled out on the rocky shores of the UK coastline. Males are larger and darker than the females, and have wonderful long, slightly curved noses, giving them a rather noble countenance. Compared to smaller, spottier, cat-like common seals, grey seals have blotchy or plain fur coats and a dog-like appearance.

Cornwall Seal Group Research Trust (CSGRT) have been monitoring individual seals in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly by using the unique pattern of a seal's fur. Photo identification of each seal means their movements can be monitored non-invasively and sites of importance to the species can be pinpointed. Seals have linked the Scillies (a European Marine Site designated for their protection) to 15 other sites in Cornwall, north Devon and south west Wales.

High levels of anthropogenic marine activity have become an area of concern for groups such as CSGRT, who advise that snorkelers, divers, beach goers and boat handlers should not approach seals or disturb them. Repeated disturbance has a metabolic cost to seals and may also result in injuries as they scramble away from haul outs to re-enter the sea. For pups under two years old, who already have a mortality rate of up to 75%, this can mean that they do not gain enough weight to survive. However, chance encounters with curious seals are not a rare occurrence, and by staying still and quiet at a respectful distance, most effects of disturbance can be avoided.

Scilly Seal Snorkelling are an experienced wildlife friendly operator for encounters with seals in the water, but the seals themselves are in charge of the experience. As with any wildlife, if they are feeling shy, they may not make an appearance at all. Luckily for us, the seals had no reservations. We spent an hour and a half of bliss observing them and enjoying their occasional curious visits to the surface to explore our fins, gently touch our hands with their flippers or noses and sometimes just float and stare at us with those lovely big dark eyes. I was utterly captivated!

Last year I had the opportunity to visit a Forest School. My immediate thoughts, having never heard of one before, were that children would be taught their Maths and English lessons as usual, but with chairs and walls replaced by logs and trees. I wouldn't say I disliked the idea of it, but it definitely didn't excite me! However, since going there I now realise how wrong my perception was. Forest School isn't only about gaining numerical and literacy skills. It's about adventure, health, creativity and helping children to love and care for nature.

Since 2000, Forest Schools have become increasingly more popular throughout the UK. They were inspired by the Scandinavian outdoor learning approach, dating from at least the 19th century. The World Outside (an established Forest School) describes them as a way to give "everyone, particularly children and young people, the opportunity to learn through experience within a woodland setting in a hands on manner, to develop their self-esteem and confidence". Although sessions can vary depending on the Forest School, all sessions focus on the holistic development of those taking part. Sessions occur bi-weekly during the school term (regardless of the season or weather) and occur in addition to traditional education, instead of replacing it.

Although my initial thoughts of Forest Schools are in some ways accurate (those who take part can gain more academic skills in line with the national curriculum), the strong emphasis on hands-on learning helps children to develop practical skills as well. They take part in building shelters, dens and campfires, all from natural materials they find in the forest. Here, tree climbing and fire lighting are encouraged. This enables them to explore the woodland area and helps them become familiar with the different types of flora and fauna.

Traditional schools seem to be adopting stricter health and safety regulations, which can discourage those of a younger age from spending time enjoying the natural environment that surrounds them. When I was able to speak to the practitioners of a Forest School near me they seemed keen to allow the children to discover

and understand the risks of outdoor play in as fun a way as possible. Games were designed that encouraged children to run around a fire pit instead of straight through it. This then helped them to develop fire safety awareness for when they toasted marshmallows around the fire.

Studies in America report that those who spend more time outdoors tend to be more imaginative and creative. Many children are reported as being more confident and develop greater concentration than before these sessions commenced. The different activities that take place also help to improve the children's fine motor skills and stamina, as well as allowing them to live a healthier lifestyle as they can run about and enjoy the outdoors, without feeling restricted for space.

Forest Schools let children fall in love with nature from a young age. They feel more connected to the outdoors, which in turn can make them to want to protect the natural environment as much as possible. As a result, it's thought that this causes less anti-social behaviour. There has even been a term coined for those who don't spend enough time in nature; 'Nature Deficit Disorder'. Forest Schools aim to obliterate this.

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) have been quoted saying "Outdoor education gives depth to the curriculum and makes an important contribution to student's physical, personal and social education."

Personally, in a world that is becoming increasingly urbanised, I hope that Forest Schools become even more popular than they are already. I think they are a brilliant way to give young people the chance to spend a greater amount of time outdoors than they might otherwise be able to. And while these types of outdoor learning approaches typically centre on children, it is also nice knowing that adults can have the opportunity to engage in the woodland too; including those with behavioural difficulties. Nature shouldn't be limited for a select few to experience, and schools like these make sure that it isn't.

Words by Georgie Lamb

Lauren Fitton

Lauren Fitton is an illustrator who focuses on animals. Here, she tells us about her process and why nature is her biggest inspiration.

Hi Lauren! Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I graduated with a degree in illustration in 2016 and since then I've been studying for an MA in children's book illustration. Children's books are what first got me interested in illustration and since then, I've wanted to work on books of my own. I've loved drawing for as long as I can remember but only found a process of illustrating that works for me really in the past few years, experimenting with various media and always coming back to pencil. It wasn't until the final year of my degree when I was working on a children's picture book called 'Going Home' that I found a way of integrating my pencil studies with colour and various digital techniques which is how I've been working ever since.

What inspires you and your artwork?

In terms of subject matter, the majority of my work takes inspiration from nature. I watch a lot of documentaries and look at nature and wildlife photography which often inspire my stories. I'm always trying to find new ways of introducing colour to my illustrations and experiment with layout. That's usually where I take inspiration from other illustrators and designers and sometimes look at current design trends and how I can adapt them to my work.

What is your favourite piece?

I recently began a personal project, illustrating threatened animals or those close to extinction. I decided to do these drawings on a larger scale than I usually work so that I could include more detail and really liked how this works for my drawing of the whale shark.

Do you spend a lot of time in nature observing animals?

There's a deer park not far from where I live that I love to go to, but I must admit that because I tend to draw a lot of larger animals (e.g. whales) I can't easily observe them in the wild although I'd love to travel to somewhere I could. Instead, if I'm on a walk I tend to focus more on trees and plants and either sit and draw them or take a lot of photographs for later reference.

Why do you tend to focus on natural subjects?

Nature is an endless source of inspiration for me. I'll often be working on one piece and get an idea for another book or print that I want to make. While there are a number of illustrators I find inspirational whose work focuses on people and human behaviour, I find plants and animals so much more interesting to draw and learn more about.

What is your process? How long does a piece take?

Depending on the size of a drawing, a single piece could take anywhere from a couple of hours to over a week. The majority if not all of my drawings are done in pencil which is the most time-consuming stage. After the drawing is finished I usually scan it in and clean it up on photoshop and play with the levels to try and get the scan as close to the physical drawing as I can. Then depending on how I want the piece to look, I will play around with colours and textures usually on photoshop. This is the stage I find the hardest because a technique that may work for one drawing may not work for another.

What are you currently working on?

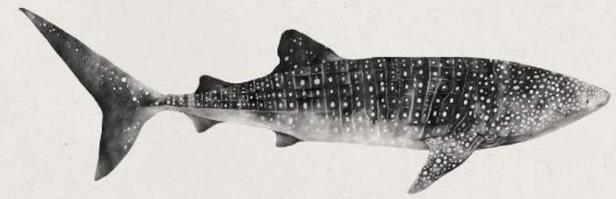
At current, I'm working on another book for my degree about a mother and baby whale. I've had this idea for quite a while so it's exciting to finally start on the illustrations.

What advice do you have for young illustrators?

It's hard to give advice when I'm just starting out myself. However, I think that you can't go wrong if you're drawing what you love and want to learn more about, then with a bit of luck you'll start to attract clients with similar interests to you that you're excited to work with.

Website: www.laurenfittonillustration.co.uk
Shop: www.etsy.com/uk/shop/lfittonillustration
Instagram: @laurencfitton

Whale shark - illustration mentioned as favourite piece from my personal project illustrating threatened animals.
Going Home page - page from my children's book 'Going Home' mentioned about a polar bear named Victor who escapes captivity and tries to find his way back home (was highly commended by the Pan Macmillan (children's book illustration competition) judges)
The size of our kingdom poster - a collaboration of all of the illustrations in my children's book 'the size of our kingdom'. The book shows a range of animals in size order, from the smallest to the biggest.



The Wonder of THE WILD WATCH

Some of you may know if you follow my blog that I've been given a lot of great opportunities, such as radio interviews or going to promote nature at national science fairs, it's all been great. I never knew when I started out on my blogging that I'd be given the chance to do so many amazing things. It seems that this went to another level this year as I've had the chance to do something I never thought I'd get the chance to do.

I live in a wonderful part of the world, in my opinion. Surrounding me are lots of beautiful places like the North York Moors, and the Yorkshire Dales. Another place people may not know about is the Nidderdale AONB, also a wonderful part of the world. I've been to places there before like the wonderful World Heritage site of Studley Royal and Fountains Abbey, and the amazing Brimham Rocks with its fantastic formations. But I've really come to realise just how special this area is because of an incredible project called The Wild Watch. This is run by a lovely group of people who have asked me to be the Youth Patron or ambassador for the project.

Of course I jumped at the chance to do this and since they invited me I've been attending whatever events I can get to and doing my part for the project. The main aim of the Wild Watch project is to map the wildlife of Nidderdale. They are using volunteers to survey 50 key species of conservation concern across the AONB area, as well as mapping a few invasive species too. It's a big citizen science project but concentrates on a few key species in transects across the area. From the data collected they'll be able to build a picture of the area and what is flourishing where, or where work is needed to help some species, or get rid of some invasive species.

So far, I've been to three brilliant events. The first was a training session on river surveying. We were told which species we had to look out for and the key signs to tell if they are present. I'm most interested in surveying otters, water voles, himalayan balsam (booo!) and azure damselflies. The classroom session was followed with practical demos on local rivers, mostly on how to find otters and water voles. This included looking for droppings and prints. I now know how otter spraint (otter poo to you and me) smells! All in all, this was a great day and I had a lot of fun and learnt loads!

The second event was a Bird Song Chorus event, run for younger people by Peter Cowdrey of Planet Birdsong and Isak Herman from Cambridge University, two wonderful people. In the first session we got to play with games Isak has designed to help people learn to identify the different birds of Nidderdale and their calls. They're memory games where you had to flip over the different tiles and remember where the matching bird was. As the levels get harder you end up with just the bird song to match up.

After this, Peter showed us how we can make music like bird calls, and then proceeded to get his trombone out and mimic a goldfinch call which had been slowed down! It was very clever how he could imitate and make music out of a bird's call, especially one as fast as a goldfinch's! He demonstrated what you can do with slowed down bird calls and the human voice and how songs you can create can then be sped up and sound just like a real one! Doing this, you can record calls so good that the birds will respond to them! It taught me a whole lot about bird calls, how they are structured and how birds use them.

The last event I went to was the Wild Watch Launch. I'd been invited as Youth Patron to give a talk! I was surprised to see the other speakers were mostly all Professors and Doctors (so no pressure!) It was held in a lovely little building called 'The Playhouse' in Pateley Bridge. There were some great speakers there and I think everybody there was captivated by what was being said. Eventually though, it was time for my talk. I'd been rehearsing for about a week and I think it went alright. My talk was about engaging the next generation of conservationists, and I went over a couple of reasons that I think why most people my age aren't into nature, and what I think the solutions are. It was my first public presentation like that and I was a bit nervous, but it seemed to go okay and lots of people said afterwards that I'd done pretty well (phew!).

I've done my river surveys too. My transect is along an old Victorian lake. It's a really beautiful place. It seems like a totally forgotten area that's been left to get overgrown. Which makes it a bit tricky to survey but it's very, very tranquil and full of wildlife. Not so much of the wildlife that I was looking for, though we found otter spraint, but lots of lovely creatures to see all the same. On my second visit I was lucky enough to see a water shrew. I'd never seen one before, in fact I didn't know it was a different species to other shrews. Amazing creatures, very fast and fidgety! If it wasn't for the project I wouldn't have found this amazing place or this incredible little creature!

I'm looking forward to further training sessions soon, including learning how to do surveys for reptiles so I can get involved in that. I hope I can learn the signs to look out for adders and grass snakes in particular!

So, I have to say a huge thank you again to the Wild Watch for giving me such an amazing opportunity, and to Yorkshire Wildlife Trust for suggesting I get involved. It's only the first year of the project, and there's two more to go (and probably more as it's going to be a huge success).

I never thought opportunities like this were out there for people my age but they are. Lots of projects want young people's opinions, ideas and involvement. It's really great fun too. I know New Nature readers know this but I hope you can get involved in projects like this and spread the message about the importance and benefit of nature to lots more young people.

Words by Zach Haynes

The Comeback of Otters on the River Don

Words by Helina Hickey

Crouching over a rock sniffing a bit of poo – does it have the distinctive sweet and surprisingly pleasant smell that indicates this is an otter spraint? That was exactly what I found myself doing when volunteering for Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trusts' Otterly Amazing project. Otters belong to the mustelid, or weasel, family and can grow up to 1.3 meters long and weigh about 9 kg. Otters are very elusive and have an acute sense of smell, as well as very good eyesight and hearing which means you would be incredibly lucky to see one in the wild. They live in holes dug in the river bank called a 'holt' which has multiple entrances. Otters are territorial and mark their territories with spraints (faeces). These undeniably cute looking animals are currently undergoing a comeback throughout England. However, the situation was dramatically different in the mid-90s when otter numbers plummeted due to water pollution, habitat loss and persecution.

The river Don, which flows through Sheffield, and whose banks I was walking keeping my eyes peeled for footprints, spraints or feeding signs, was thought to be the most polluted river in the whole of Europe during the industrial revolution due to the flourishing steel industry. That was the time when otters disappeared from Sheffield as the river was not able to support sufficient prey populations, so pollution was taking a toll on the survival of this animal. However, a while back whispers started to go around that otters were being seen on the river again and 10 years ago a survey was carried out. Signs of otters were seen but no actual sightings of the animals by the surveyors. In spring 2016, Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust started the Otterly Amazing project to carry out another otter survey on the river Don and this time they meant business. Volunteers were trained to spot and identify otter signs, camera traps were installed to capture footage and Sheffield University was taken aboard to conduct DNA sampling of faeces. A total of 24 km of river was searched for over a year, over 100 otter spraints were identified and collected, 22 videos of otters were captured (to see all the footage, you can visit www.wildsheffield.com/otterly-amazing) and in September 2017 they revealed the results.

Due to the elusive nature of otters none were seen while surveying, even identifying signs was sometimes challenging, but it was clear – otters are roaming the river Don and seemed to feel rather at home even in the city centre. This was a great start but we wanted to know more; how many otters are there? Are they established or just passing by? And can we sex them? It is well documented that extracting DNA from otter spraints is difficult but the team managed to obtain genetic profiles showing that seven otters passed through the study area in 2017 and at least two of them were males. One female otter was detected further north at a more rural site. Additionally, DNA-based diet analyses revealed that otters were feeding on fish such as bullhead, stickleback, minnow and other larger fish as well as birds and amphibians. Microscopic study showed that they also feed on crayfish which is likely to be the invasive signal crayfish.

These results show that the hard work that has been done to improve the water quality in the river Don has paid off. Having a top predator like otter inhabiting a river proves that the river is able to support a full and functioning food chain. It also demonstrates that otters can utilise urban environments, during the study it became clear very quickly that their favourite place to mark territories and play around was under bridges where they had enough dry ground and they were sheltered. All this is wonderful news, however, otters still face significant threats. While they seem to be happy co-existing with people in urban settings, they still need dry ground on riverbanks. New developments along rivers with high banks make it more difficult for otters to establish as there is nowhere to dig holts or to mark territories. Furthermore, not everybody welcomes the return of otters – many anglers and fishery owners regard them as a nuisance and increasingly more otters die in car collisions. However, these problems can be overcome and hopefully there will be a bright future for the otters in Sheffield and across England.

ROBINS

Words by Laura Butler

Crowned the UK's national bird in 1960, the European robin has endeared the British public with its melodious song and cheeky persona. Holding their territories throughout the whole year, the robin is one of the only UK birds heard to be singing on Christmas day.

Last winter saw the number of robins visiting gardens reach a 20 year high. This was driven by two years of warm and wet winters. 130,000 more robins have been spotted this year, compared to 2014 when a period (2008-2014) of colder conditions had been more prevalent.

The diet of the robin includes worms, insects and spiders during the warmer months, and berries, fruits and seeds during the colder months. Known particularly well to British gardeners, the robin is relatively unafraid of people, and is drawn to human activities which involve digging the soil, exposing earthworms and other foods that they can snap up. Robins are also known to have a sweet tooth, and will happily feed on fruit cakes and pastry.

Male robins are recognised for their distinctive territorial behaviour, and will quickly drive away any intruders – whether an apparent threat or not. They have been known to attack other small birds without even being provoked. These attacks can occasionally lead to fatalities, with up to 10% of adult robin deaths resulting from this behaviour in some areas. Due to their high mortality rate in the first year, the robin lives for an average of 1.1 years. However, after the first year they can expect to live longer, and one robin has been recorded as living for 19 years! This territoriality explains the often stereotypical image of a robin perched on a spade. Female robins are territorial too, and during winter both males and females will protect their own feeding territories. By Christmas time they usually pair up. Despite rarely spending much time together, they will stick with each other until the following year's moult.

Moulting, a process of shedding and regrowing feathers, takes place in late summer. Through shedding old, worn out feathers and growing new, stronger ones, the birds are prepared for the cold winter ahead. This process is particularly draining; energy is required to grow the new feathers, it is harder to fly effectively if some feathers have been lost, and heat-retention is compromised. During this time, the birds are also more vulnerable to predation, so sing less, and try to keep hidden. This is why the autumn is probably the best time to see the robin, after it has emerged from its moult with a beautiful new plumage, and a new vigour to sing.

The robin builds its nest in a range of different sites; from the more usual depressions or holes, to bicycle handlebars, barbecues and watering cans. The nests are made from moss, leaves and grass, with fine grass and hair used for lining the inside. Two or three clutches of five or six eggs are laid throughout the breeding season, which usually starts in March in Britain. Juvenile birds are a mottled brown colour all over, but after two to three months some orange feathers start to grow under their chins, and over time this extends to complete the familiar adult appearance.

George Monbiot

Alex Pearce gets the environmental writer's views on the natural world, rewilding, politics, loneliness and much much more.

When did your love of nature start/what got you interested?

It was there from the beginning. I'm told that even as I lay in my pram, I was fascinated by every living thing I saw. I don't know where it came from, though I suspect that, to a greater or lesser degree, it is in all of us, and is later suppressed by competing influences.

But in my case it developed with the help of my grandmother, who spent every possible hour outdoors, and taught me to identify plants and insects, to fish and tie my own flies, and instilled in me the virtues of physical toughness and weather resistance.

There was also a wonderful teacher at my first school, who took us for walks in the woods, and, as well as instructing us about wildlife, filled them with magical beings, in whom, as far as I could tell, she really believed. Her dismantling of the barriers between the natural world and what she saw as the spiritual world – though she probably would not have described herself as such, she was plainly an animist – infused nature with an even greater wonder.

What do you think about 'nature deficit disorder'? Why do you think young people aren't connecting with the natural world?

While it might be insufficiently evidenced to qualify as a medical condition, it is a powerful metaphor, and an effective means of framing what is unquestionably a problem.

I believe there are several reasons for this alienation from the natural world. One of them, plainly, is technology: television and the internet have provided alternative sources of wonder and entertainment. Another, that is exacerbated by the first reason, is social breakdown: unless you have a group of friends with whom to play outdoors, you have less incentive to leave your home. A third is the self-generating problem of the loss of knowledge, that leads to a loss of interest, that leads to a further loss of knowledge.

The effects are disastrous. If people lose contact with nature, they are unlikely to defend it, or to understand their own impacts upon it. It exacerbates social breakdown, because kids aren't playing outdoors together without adult supervision, and learning for themselves crucial social skills. It exacerbates obesity and unfitness. Perhaps above all, it detaches children from physical reality: they become less able to discern what is real and what is not, what the physical limits of the world might be, what is possible and what is impossible. We are bringing up a generation to whom it will be easy to lie.

You say you got your first job in environmental investigation through being persistent; what advice would you give to today's young people about getting work in the industry?

There is, sadly, no "industry" of this kind, into which people can step. Nor has there ever been. Environmental journalism is something that happens despite the system, not because of it. I am now, apparently, the only remaining newspaper columnist in the UK who consistently writes about environmental issues - unless you count those who consistently deny them.

This hostility towards talking about our impacts on the living world has been the case throughout my career. When I started work at the BBC, there was no investigative environmental programme making – I saw it as my mission to introduce it, and succeeded, until Margaret Thatcher launched her coup against the BBC, and all investigative work, across the corporation, came to a sudden halt.

There will always be a powerful bias against environmental reporting and exposure, because it conflicts with both commercial priorities (much of the commercial sector depends for its profits on exploiting the natural world) and material aspirations, that most media outlets seek to foster. So the world's greatest crises, and humanity's greatest predicaments, are obscured, and we are left in ignorance, and therefore unable to respond.

So if you want to become an environmental journalist, you have to create the role for yourself. You have to use all the wit and enterprise and cunning at your disposal to make it happen, and you have to be persistent not only in pursuing the first opportunity, but in pursuing every other opportunity you are able to create. These roles do not exist until you invent them.

You're very political; do you actively encourage young people to take more interest in the political world? What are your thoughts on lowering the voting age?

Getting political is the only means by which we can confront the disastrous convergence of crises we now face, that will damage or even destroy the welfare of people who are young today.

Environmental destruction, inequality, the slow collapse of public health and education services, insecurity, low wages, horrible working conditions, tuition fees, homelessness: these things do not happen by themselves; they are all the result of policy. Unless we are involved in political movements (i.e. not just voting once every five years) that challenge the policies and refine the electoral decisions we make, politics will remain dominated by a remote and uncaring elite, whose interests are best served by denying rights and justice to others, and dumping their costs on the living world and future generations. Bad things happen because good people don't get involved.

On the voting age, yes, I support the calls to reduce it to 16.

We could do with an environment minister as passionate and understanding as yourself – have you ever considered venturing into parliament?!

Thanks – but no thanks. I know my limits. I'm good at thinking, writing, researching and public speaking; I'm really useless at negotiating and networking and organising, which are essential political skills. Even worse, I am wholly incapable of sticking to someone else's programme – in other words, I couldn't handle party loyalty. I believe that I'm in the very lucky position of doing what I'm best suited to, and if I did anything else I would be wasting the few capabilities I possess.

Effective politics requires people with a range of skills performing a range of roles. One of the essential roles is thinking stuff through and writing about it. We also need good and effective politicians, but it is a mistake to imagine that because someone can perform one of these roles, they can perform the other.

Trump recently pulled America out of the Paris Climate Agreement and you labelled it 'a blow against young people'; what can young people do to try and steer their future in a more positive direction?

The best thing you can do, at any time, is to combine with other people in pursuit of common goals. Despite the romance and mythology about being a lone ranger or a self-made man or woman, we can achieve almost nothing alone. There are some brilliant social and environmental movements, but they need to become much bigger and more effective, and the best thing most people can do is to help them fulfil that. I suggest in my new book some of the ways in which we can combine more effectively to turn what appear to be hopeless situations into a viable model for political change.

You've focused a lot on rewilding, what do you think about the argument that we have meddled enough to negative effect and should leave well alone?

Well, rewilding is, to a large extent, about leaving well alone. It's about letting natural processes unfold without our intervention, to the greatest extent possible. But for this to happen, we have first to put in place some essential missing elements; reintroducing keystone species (animals and plants that play crucial ecological roles); reconnecting fragmented habitats and undoing some of the damage we have inflicted (removing fences, closing roads, taking out dams and weirs). Then, to the greatest extent that politics allows, we should step back.

In other words, instead of the perpetual management that conservation envisages, rewilding frontloads intervention to then allow the living world to do what it does best – to find its own equilibrium.

You have exposed some dark truths about politics and the environmental world; do you consider yourself positive or negative about our future? If you have a positive outlook, what keeps you so?

I swing from one pole to the other. Sometimes I despair at the astonishing rapidity of environmental collapse: runaway climate breakdown, the rising tide of plastic, the death of coral reefs, the disappearance of insects, the vanishing of lions and rhinos, the conflagration of the Indonesian rainforest, happening before our eyes. The speed of this destruction, and the way in which, without a moment's thought, we collaborate in it, and are induced by advertising and marketing to aggravate our impacts, leaves me stunned.

Sometimes I feel that the world has gone mad. I see people driving their children 100 metres to school in monster cars. I see them buying crates of bottled water, that someone else has filled from a tap. I see them eating meat at every meal, without any thought for the consequences. I see them flying halfway round the world to go to a party. And it can make me feel isolated and overwhelmed.

But then I stumble again across the astonishing human capacity for altruism, empathy and mutual aid, and remember what remarkable creatures we are, and how these innate qualities have been crushed by an inhumane system, which drives us into this irrational behaviour. I remind myself that our task is to allow our true nature to reveal itself, a nature that, as findings in neuroscience, psychology, anthropology and evolutionary biology show, is an extreme biological outlier (we are far more altruistic than any other species, while our tendency towards cooperation is exceeded among mammals only by the naked mole rat). These are the tendencies we should mobilise, and the possibility of doing so fills me with hope.

What encouraged you to turn to music in order to aid loneliness?

If I sought to claim that I made a considered and calculated decision, I would be deceiving you. Like almost everything I do, the idea of writing an album came as an inspiration, to which I responded impetuously. Even so, it made sense: there's something inherently contradictory in writing a book or an article about loneliness, as that requires separating yourself from people, and people tend to read them alone.

But music has an inherent tendency to bring people together, and with my collaborator, Ewan McLennan, we sought to use it to create social connection where it did not exist before. As well as getting people to sing together at our gigs, we obliged them to talk to strangers at the end, and then continued every evening with a party in the nearest bar or pub. It worked amazingly well. People came together across social and generational divides. We met some amazing folk and learnt a great deal. I feel enriched by the experience, and I hope other people do too.

What would your advice be to any young people who are feeling isolated or lonely?

First, to recognise that you are not the only one. One of the paradoxical effects of loneliness is that you can imagine it's happening only to you, and that everyone else is having a great time: in fact, loneliness and FOMO [fear of missing out] are, in my mind at least, closely connected.

In reality, loneliness is now an epidemic, afflicting millions of people in this nation and elsewhere. In a world of 7 billion, many have no one they can call a friend. So don't imagine that you are alone in your loneliness, or that it is your fault: these are massive social trends driven by technological, cultural and ideological change.

One of the best ways of overcoming loneliness is to volunteer. As a volunteer, you are not a supplicant: in other words, you are not asking for help; rather, you are giving it. But in helping other people, or a cause or a campaign, you are creating the connections that will enhance your own life. You meet other people, often very kind and loving people – as these are the sort that volunteering tends to attract. And you will be welcome, because you will be playing a necessary role. And, even while helping yourself, you can be assured that you are doing something useful. This is the basis of mutual aid.

What can we expect from you in the future?

As usual, I'm working on a ridiculous number of projects. My latest non-fiction book has just come out. I'm writing a novel, collaborating on a graphic novel, making a load of videos, and, of course, writing my columns. And, most importantly, I'm bringing up my two daughters, and trying to help them navigate a fraught and complex world.

www.monbiot.com
@GeorgeMonbiot

Wildlife Photography

Matt Livesey talks us through his creative journey and the process behind his great bird shots

Wildlife photography differs from many other hobbies in the way that there is no real guaranteed way to learn it. It's not something you can really receive regular "coaching" on, unless you have the luck to know a seasoned photographer with both the time and the patience to lug you around along with the rest of their kit. I have never been to a camera club and therefore cannot say for sure what learning opportunities they may present. However, from the research I have done and experience of my own university photography society, they may not be best suited to learning skills specific to wildlife photography. I therefore think that for young people who have a passion for nature and capturing what they see, it is a very uphill struggle. Add in the camera and lens prices that only seem affordable if you're willing to sell your organs on the black market, and it's a veritable mountain. It's no wonder that most wildlife photographers I encounter are in the post retirement group, with a lot of time and perhaps some savings to invest into a new hobby.

However, by no means do I think young aspiring wildlife photographers should be dissuaded from climbing this mountain. Being self-taught since I first picked up a camera five years ago, I firmly consider myself to be still working towards the summit, with a considerable way to go to achieve my goals. The last five years have involved a lot of experimentation to see what works best, along with trying to put into practice information I have found in various books and on websites. Currently my earliest picture I have kept is from a year and a half ago, meaning I effectively spent three and a half years purely learning. I hope that by sharing some of what I have learned, this may aid people in saving a lot of time and frustration.

I could talk about exposure, shutter speed and ISO sensitivity along with other topics under the themes of "camera settings". However, I feel that general advice about these topics is found easily enough online. The first two things that I want to highlight can both be classed under the theme of "composition". These are the angle at which you take the photograph, and what you include in the photograph. It took me far too long to realize that often what can make or break a photo is the angle at which your camera points in relation to the bird. For the best results, you should always be at eye level with the creature you are photographing. This not only avoids framing the bird from a "human" viewpoint, but also makes it stand out from the background. If I had photographed this lapwing from above, it would have resulted in a far darker background and the bird standing out less.

The other key compositional aspect it has taken me a long time to realise is that of filling the frame. This shoveler was one of my earlier photos and very much reflects my attitude at the time – the bigger the better. Whilst it's not technically a bad photo, I realised all the photos that appealed to me online were those in which the bird was smaller in the frame and showed more of its environment. This technique is also a useful way of still achieving a pleasing photo, even if you can't get close enough to have the subject very large in the frame. This photo of a stonechat for example came about as it was too far away to allow for a more traditional frame filling shot. It was therefore essentially by accident that I discovered this way of composing photos was far more pleasing than my previous technique of "frame filling", and from then on I began to change my style.

"It took me far too long to realize that often what can make or break a photo is the angle at which your camera points in relation to the bird."

The last thing that I want to touch on is where to take photos. Birds in parks and beaches which attract lots of people are usually more tolerant of humans than the same species in remote nature reserves. Gulls at busy beaches are often far more approachable than those at quiet areas of the coast. The downside to this though is that people sometimes interfere with photo opportunities, sometimes in quite unexpected ways. This lesser black-backed gull was taken at the busy beach in Cromer, and was relatively unfazed by my presence. What the picture doesn't reveal however is that half way through photographing it, a six year old boy ran in front of my camera, scared it away and then promptly began to go to the toilet in front of me. Not really wanting to be seen standing feet away with a telephoto lens pointed in the direction, I had to abandon my attempts at getting pictures of the gull for a while. I somehow doubt I'd run into the same problem sitting in a hide at a nature reserve.

7 YEARS OF CAMERA SHAKE – DAVID PLUMMER

Words by Isabel Lewis

Back in September I was lucky enough to meet wildlife photographer David Plummer and attend the launch for his new book '7 Years of Camera Shake'. The book is a beautiful collection of David's work, showcasing a variety of stunning shots from both his travels around the world and from his home patch in Sussex. Seven years prior to producing his book, David was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and it has been during these following years that David has produced some of his best work yet, from which the book is compiled.

Right from his early childhood David was fixated with wildlife, though at that age saving up for a long-focus camera lens with just his pocket money proved difficult. By the time he was in his early twenties David was setting off with budget camera equipment and homemade hides to begin his journey of becoming the photographic artist that he is today. Starting out in his immediate surroundings of Kent and Sussex, flora proved to be a more accommodating subject for David to learn the ropes; less likely to fly or scamper away. It was from there that David began to get to grips with his craft and quickly moved on to photographing wild animals. David has always made a point of only photographing animals in the wild and his aversion to taking shots of caged animals is stated from the get-go in his book. Photographing wildlife is perhaps considered as the most difficult form of photography and one that is constantly evolving. However, not to dishearten any budding naturalists just starting out with a camera, equipment today is far more efficient and accessible than it was when David began. Although he does attribute his necessary resourcefulness and persistence to his limited gear at the beginning of his career.

David's career has taken him all over the globe from the African Plains, to the Galapagos Islands and Hungarian wetlands to name a few. '7 Years of Camera Shake' captures wildlife in many different habitats, such as these, but there is also a large focus on British wildlife. In fact, David devotes a whole chapter titled 'Home Ground' to images from his local patch in Sussex amongst the other British wildlife photos featured throughout the book. Growing up in the South East of England, David's passion for nature started at home and his deep appreciation for the local wildlife becomes very apparent when reading the book.

David has accumulated quite a repertoire of animals in his photographic collection over the years, capturing many exotic and magnificent creatures. Yet, he gets just as much excitement when hiding out with a camera in the British countryside in wait of the many remarkable animals that roam there. He has expressed he would be a happy man if he could only immerse himself in British nature for the rest of his life, and when viewing his book, you can tell why.

What becomes increasingly clear as you make your way through '7 Years of Camera Shake' is the immense determination and patience that David has needed to achieve the chosen shots. Many feature rarely sighted animals such as coyotes, badgers and owls and it is that elusive quality that first attracted David to seeking them out. In fact, owls are featured heavily in the book and are dear to David's heart. His 'Home Ground' chapter captures multiple native species, from tawny owls (*Strix aluco*) to short-eared owls (*Asio flammeus*) and barn owls (*Tyto alba*). Through his work at the Knepp Castle Estate in West Sussex, David has also been able to spend time observing and photographing the charismatic little owl (*Athene noctua*), capturing action shots as well as their social interactions. The estate is a perfect example of a rewilding project whereby the wildlife is given freedom to establish its own ecosystem, something that David strives to achieve in his own back garden and in the private patch of ancient woodland that he purchased back in 2005.

David spoke with dry wit at the book launch, telling funny anecdotes from his varied career, such as awkward encounters with ramblers when hiding in full camouflage in the nearby bushes. He also touched on his diagnosis and work with Parkinson's UK, and 50% of the proceeds of the book go to the charity, to help people with Parkinson's and to aid research into a cure.

David's work, as much as it provides us with an insight into the many aspects of wildlife, from affection and play to brutal hunting and fighting, is much more than just recording nature. They say never judge a book by its cover, although it is clear from the stunning monochrome shot of a jaguar on the front of '7 Years of Camera Shake' that David has put together a collection of evoking wildlife art and not mere documentations. The book provides an understanding of David's processes and development as well as exhibiting the stunning photos that make one envious of his craft and his rich career.

ISLAND HOPPING

A serendipitous journey to the Scottish Western Isles

Words and Images by Camila Quinteros Peñafiel

Almost four years in Scotland and no other place has caught my attention more than Scotland itself. The powerful guiding lights of Fair Isle touched my heart for a long time, but it was time to carry on and keep searching for this ineffable feeling of plenitude that the Scottish Isles can give.

Drawn by the island life, lighthouses, cold weather, treeless and remote places, along with lovely company, a new adventure had begun. By leaving my Scottish second home near Oban, I took the Scottish City Link bus to Inverness, another to Ullapool Pier to get on board the CalMac ferry to Stornoway – the capital of the Outer Hebrides.

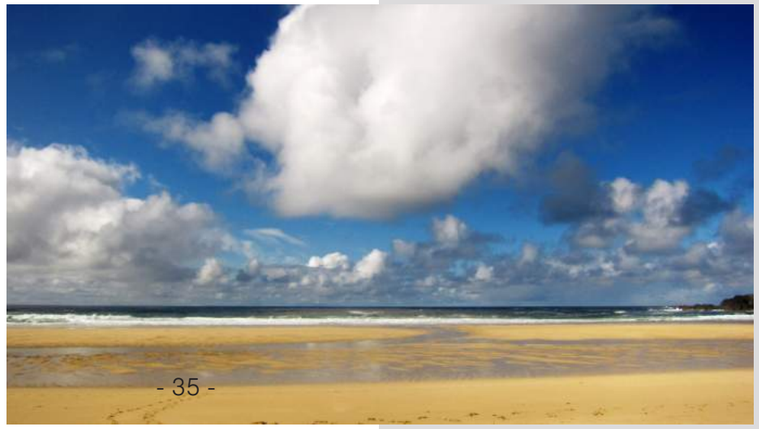
A Shepherd's Hut in Bragar was home for a while, with the heat of a peat-burning stove, looking out to the Atlantic through an exceptionally rare habitat, almost entirely confined to the Hebrides and north west of Scotland, the Machair. Regardless of the season, this was a chance to get close to the nature, history and heritage of these islands. And that is what happened, a stunning journey across the Isle of Lewis, with fine coastal sandy beaches and impressive sea cliffs. The music of the Scottish band 'Skipinnish' often plays on the bus, it makes you feel you are really 'Walking on the Waves'. There was an arrangement of standing stones, covered by lichens at the top, placed in a cruciform pattern with a central stone circle – the Callanish Stones, a visit to these is truly like a traveling in time.

There is a saying about "listening to the silence, be still and let your soul catch up", that is what happens with the Butt of Lewis, a famous red brick lighthouse built by the Stevenson family. Suddenly, everything makes sense, to get close to nature is to see the astonishingly bold rabbits who are running at full speed down steep rocks among the sea cliffs, gannets diving into the sea, wildflowers characteristic of coastal habitat – that is to experience life on the edge.

Heading south, travelling on school buses, due to the time of the year, lets you submerge yourself in the culture that makes the landscape. From the Isle of Lewis, down to the mesmerizing and mountainous Isle of Harris. From the narrow tiny neck of land at Tarbert, heading to the east, there stands – in the Isle of Scalpay – the Eilean Glas Lighthouse, one of the first four lighthouses in Scotland, the lamp of which was first lit in 1789. When the sky cleared, a mass of land that was transforming into the fabulous Shiant Islands slowly started to appear in the background. A few days before this journey, I was lucky enough to see Adam Nicolson, the owner of these three tiny islands, talking about his new book in Oban, and I really can understand now what he means about the Shiants being "... the source of a deep engagement with the natural world in some of its most beautiful, alarming and all-encompassing forms...."

The compass now led to Leverburgh in the Isle of Harris to carry on heading south from Berneray in North Uist to Eriskay in South Uist. For those who are fans of the 1949 film 'Whisky Galore!', the Isle of Barra was a must. This isle is home to some truly amazing wildlife, it's where the CalMac Ferry on its five-hour journey shows you that the Inner Hebrides are over there waving and waiting to be explored, and once back in Oban we were already different people.

"So much of who we are, is where we have been", as a naturalist traveller, I keep filling my rucksack with the magic of Scotland. And transmitting these experiences in writing is a way to show that there is beauty in nature that remains out there still.



NATIONAL PARKS

a home to **conservation** and young **conservationists**

Words by Andrew Hall

At Campaign for National Parks, we believe our National Parks are special for many reasons and this makes them worth all the work we put in, day in and day out, towards their protection and improvement. One of these special qualities, and one that everyday visitors mention time and again, is the opportunities to see wildlife in fantastic, beautiful settings. But National Parks are experiencing the same declines in biodiversity we can see across the rest of the UK. With all the legal protections, public enthusiasm for National Parks and the hard work of volunteer projects, they should be bucking those trends and held up as exemplars of sustainable development with thriving ecosystems. Engaging future generations on these issues will be essential to helping achieve that.

A great part of my job is getting to hear the extensive wisdom and experiences of local wildlife campaigners, ecologists and enthusiasts in National Parks (I was, for example, recently in a bog looking at the invasive parrot's feather, *Myriophyllum aquaticum*, in the New Forest). There are hundreds of good projects happening in National Parks to boost levels of wildlife but without a new generation to pass this knowledge on to there's a serious consideration that any action on biodiversity will lose momentum in our National Parks.

Losing that local ecological expertise would be a great tragedy and spell out an ominous sign for the future of wildlife in National Parks. After all, if we cannot protect and enhance the biodiversity in National Parks, with its legal protections, funding and public support, places famed for their wild and natural beauty, where can we?

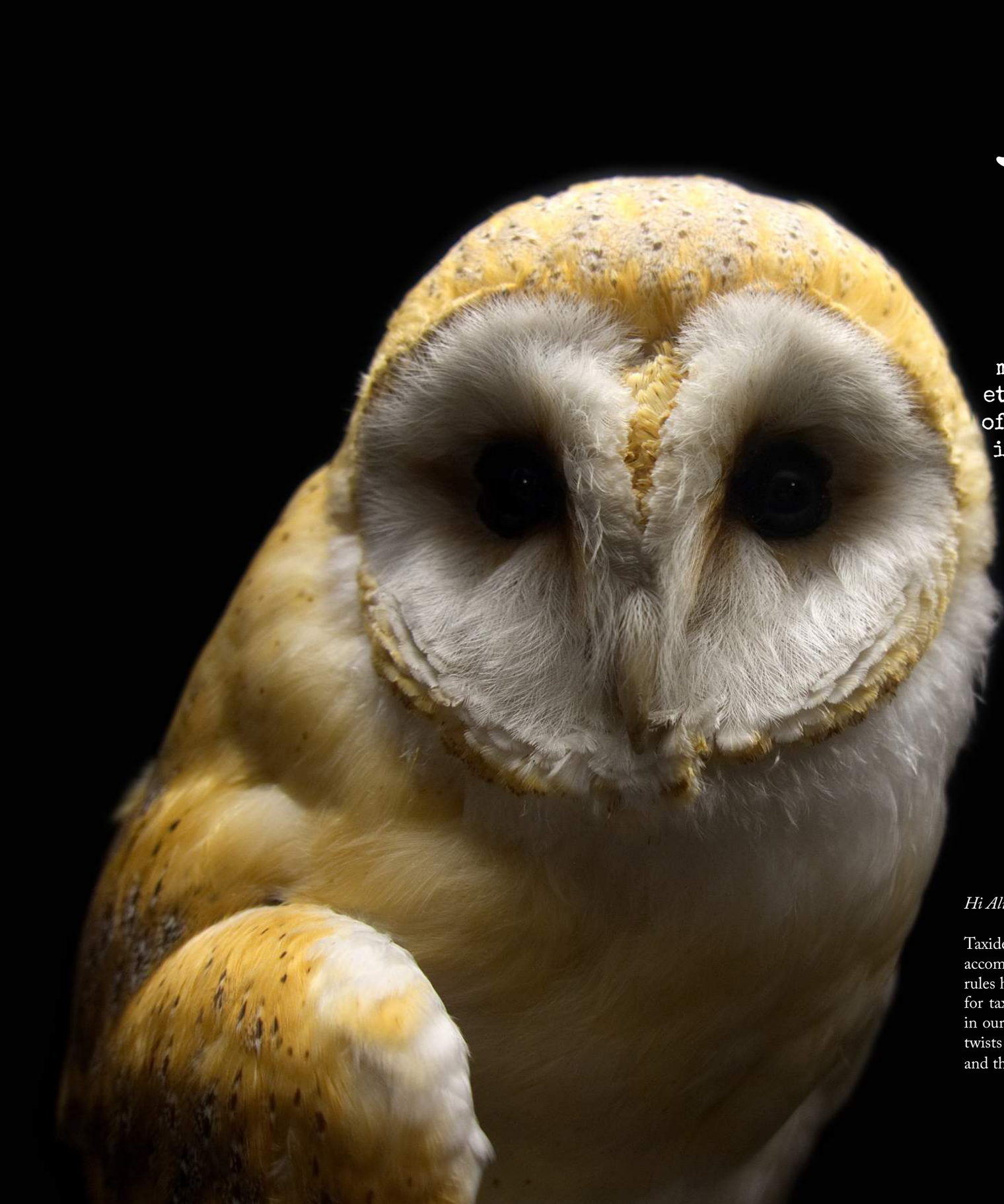
The fact is National Parks can be pretty inaccessible to even the most ardent conservationists, and especially to young adults. Limited job opportunities, unaffordable housing and poor public transport means that working or living in a National Park can be a pretty hefty obstacle to those looking to make a difference to the future of natural environments. Issues of access and biodiversity are interconnected, the barriers to sustainable access compound the loss of biodiversity we are witnessing.

I'm lucky enough to work for a charity that wants National Parks to be a home to all conservationists, young and old. That's why we keep looking at new solutions to the barriers keeping young talented conservationists away from the National Parks. Part of it is inspiring people to connect with their natural heritage, and another part is to keep campaigning on sustainable transport options.

I was recently fortunate enough to organise the annual Park Protector Award, a competition celebrating the very best projects in our National Parks and I was pleased that one of the winning projects engaged whole families in active conservation work in the North York Moors. While some of those volunteers might be a little young to take a lead in the field, it was great to see all generations making a difference in our National Parks. The wildlife is there (for now at least!). All of the UK's native reptile species can be found in the New Forest National Park, in the Peak District the leek-coloured hawkweed, *Hieracium subprasinifolium,* a species once thought to be globally extinct has been rediscovered, and pine martens, *Martes martes,* have been recently spotted in the North York Moors. Whatever your particular area of interest, be it invertebrates, flora, mammals, or birds, the incredible diversity of wetlands, uplands, moors and forests in National Parks means they can and should be the focus of attention from present and future generations of conservationists.

Campaign for National Parks believes that National Parks are inspirational places but we acknowledge that they are not perfect. However, we also know from over 80 years' experience campaigning on these issues that motivated individuals can make a big difference to their future.

Images: Campaign for National Parks



Taxidermy

Taxidermy is having a bit of a revival in the modern age, but these days it is all about being ethical and respecting wildlife. Here, Alice Rose of Taxidermy Club UK tells Alex Pearce about what it's like to be a taxidermist in the 21st century.

Hi Alice! So taxidermy in the modern age; what's it all about?

Taxidermy used to serve a few purposes historically, one of the main uses was to represent the accomplishment of a hunter from the size of the kill by having the animal's head mounted. Since rules have changed and laws are enforced to protect the welfare of species, the uses and demand for taxidermy have dramatically changed. The ethical practice of taxidermy is now imperative in our contemporary context. Nowadays we see artists using taxidermy and putting interesting twists onto the medium completely re-imagining the old craft into something relatable, beautiful and thought provoking.

How did you get into taxidermy?

Coming from an artistic background, I started to use taxidermy while studying art and design as an alternative medium, which once discovered, limitless possibilities and themes to explore came to light. Others in the Club have discovered their interest in taxidermy through various ways including the surge of popularity and exposure that the craft has had in the last five to six years. With the learning of the craft becoming more and more accessible it has become easier for those with interest to pick it up without having to seek tuition from the odd old master.

What do you enjoy about it?

Taxidermy is so rewarding because the work is honouring nature. When one refines one's skill to the point where the work is a true representation of the animal and looks realistic, there is such an overwhelming sense of accomplishment. This work takes time to master and that in itself instils discipline, a sense of patience and the importance of perseverance. The process involves such a vast array of skills, such as mathematics, chemistry, sculpting, painting, needlework and woodwork - having a natural artistic flair helps too! Honing these skills highlights the attention to detail which one must adhere to in order to accomplish fine work.

What inspires you during the creative process?

Sometimes I/we get an idea for a piece before work begins, then we follow out the plan accordingly. However, inspiration can come at any time during the process. Sometimes work begins on an animal and then an idea may develop and evolve during the process of mounting. Generally, these days I (personally) fully develop an idea, map out the plan then execute the procedure to the best of my abilities.

How does taxidermy honour nature?

Taxidermy, now more than ever, is so focused on the ethical sourcing of specimens and the strict adherence to the laws which came into place to protect species, this coupled with the work put into taxidermy demonstrates the level of care taken and respect for nature. The process of preservation itself takes a lot of care and fine attention to detail, the reconstruction of animals and focus realism is always strived to be achieved (unless the taxidermy is an art medium in which case realism is not always the priority). The study of animals in their natural environment including facial expressions, muscle structure and even social behaviours all play a part in taxidermy and in order to do the animal justice one must constantly reference and study the particular traits mentioned above. This level of dedication to a subject is surely an honour to nature, one would not expel the amount of effort and time needed to accomplish good work if one was not determined to achieve the very best outcome e.g. a close representation of nature.

Does your work ever get criticised? How do you respond to such criticisms?

Our mission at Taxidermy Club is to promote the ethical practice of taxidermy. Thanks to this ethos; criticism is rarely an issue. There will however, always be those who do not fully understand the aim of Taxidermy Club or taxidermy in general and due to the lack of understanding, flash judgments can be made about the welfare of animals used for taxidermy, and the cause of death can be questioned. If we ever do encounter a strong reaction from someone in regard to what we are doing; we would simply explain what the club actually promotes. If we experience any form of abuse or negativity on social media, in person or in any other form the immediate solution is to block the aggressor and not to respond to such negativity. We cannot be responsible to educate the ignorant few who may feel the need to jump to judgments before having done even the smallest amount of research into the matter.

What is your favourite piece?

My recent personal favourite works are by Les Deux Garçons, their little unicorn goats with beautiful bows made from silks and jewels are aesthetically wonderful and sumptuous. I like the themes of luxury clown-like motifs which the artists play with as I think they bring an air of playfulness into the previously seriously viewed craft.

What does a typical work week look like?

The administration spends a few hours each day on social media to promote upcoming events, answer email enquiries and update any new or interesting finds which anyone in the club has discovered in terms of new artists or taxidermy news. A few days minimum each week are spent working on taxidermy of our own, this can be in solitude or together depending on how busy each of the others are and what help we need with particular projects.

taxidermyclub.com

Book Review

The Seabird's Cry: The Lives and Loves of Puffins, Gannets and Other Ocean Voyagers

by Adam Nicolson

Review by Billy Mills

In the 1970s Adam Nicolson received a trio of small Hebridean islands from his father as a gift for his 21st birthday. The Shiants, as these islands are known, were uninhabited and contained a single, lonesome building in the form of a rat-infested bothy. Yet to Nicolson these islands are paradise. In a previous book, *Sea Room* (2002), Nicolson indulged his love of the Shiants with an examination of their history and geography. It is clear, given the abundance of references to fulmars and alike in *Sea Room*, that the seabird inhabitants are at the heart of his infatuation.

In Nicolson's latest work, *The Seabird's Cry*, he focuses fully on these avian occupants in what he calls: 'an exploration of the ways in which seabirds exert their hold on the human imagination'. It is certainly true that this collection of birds, equally at home above or below the wave, comprise a mysterious and bewildering group, and as Nicolson states, they 'cross the boundary between the matter-of-fact and the imagined'.

Across ten chapters Nicolson chronicles the lives and loves of ten separate seabird species or groups and brings them fully under the spotlight (fulmar, puffin, kittiwake, gull, guillemot, shag, shearwater, gannet, razorbill, and albatross). The seabirds of the Shiants form a point of reference from which Nicolson can expand, he therefore ranges from delightfully descriptive anecdotes of his own seabird encounters to global patterns and trends. Motivated by an appreciation of Jacob von Uexküll's *Umwelt* concept (the world as experienced by other organisms), Nicolson travels far and wide to uncover the hidden worlds of seabirds: from Norway and the Faroe Islands, to the Falkland Islands and South Georgia.

The greatest triumph of this work is Nicolson's capacity to unify the (often assumed) divide between science and poetry. Nicolson merges his sparkling prose with an appreciation of modern progress in seabird biology, stating that 'the astonishing findings of modern seabird scientists mean that a sense of wonder …emerges not from ignorance of the birds but from understanding them'. It is thanks to emerging scientific equipment such as depth gauges and GPS loggers, light enough to avoid hindrance, that we are presented with an array of fascinating tidbits. A guillemot can dive more than 600 feet, for instance, and a wandering albatross will fly five million miles in its lifetime.

Unfortunately, but necessarily, Nicolson concludes this celebratory work by highlighting the global decline in seabirds. As a group seabirds are the most endangered in the world. The conclusion is, of course, that primarily this is simply the cost of sharing the planet with *Homo sapiens*. But there are of course reasons for optimism. We can each play our own small part, and by way of example Nicolson points to his own successes in ridding the Shiants from rats over recent years.

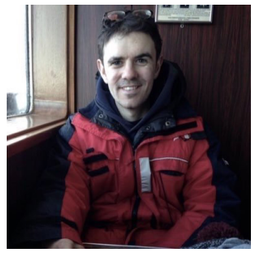
The aim of this work is to fuse our intuitive, innate appreciation of seabirds with the latest scientific discoveries, and Nicolson does just that. He writes with elegance and an obvious passion; blending fine descriptive writing with accurate scientific knowledge. I have no trouble in recommending this book to a broad readership. I suggest that *The Seabird's Cry*, which is also beautifully illustrated by Kate Boxer, will be looked upon as a classic of modern ornithological literature.

Our Contributors

Check out our amazing young contributors and connect with them online!

Andrew Hall

Andrew is the Communications and Campaigns Officer for Campaign for National Parks having previously been employed in politics and the business sector. He enjoys volunteering for London Zoo in his spare time.



Billy Mills

Billy is a seabird biologist and conservationist based at the British Antarctic Survey where he is currently studying for his Ph.D.

Camila Quinteros Peñafiel

BSc in Agriculture, MSc in Biodiversity & Taxonomy of Plants. In other words, sheep lover, field botanist and passionate explorer with an adventurer heart that follows the north of the biological compass.

Instagram @vaiteacq
Pinterest - cl.pinterest.com/vaiteacq/

Helina Hickey

Helina is a recent MSc Conservation Biology graduate from Manchester Metropolitan University who is passionate about wildlife and science. She is committed to save the world one day.

Twitter: @HelinaParnamag1

Isabel Lewis

Isabel has just completed an animal science BSc and is focused on British wildlife and the ecosystem services associated with it. She aims to further her knowledge of environmental sustainability.

Twitter: @Wildimportance
Website: wildimportance.wixsite.com/wildimportance

Laura Butler

Laura Butler works as a Marketing Executive and enjoys being creative in her spare time; painting and writing. She is passionate about wildlife conservation and enjoys learning about the natural world.

Charlotte Marshall

Charlotte is currently studying for an MSc in Conservation and Biodiversity at Exeter University. She previously spent two wonderful years working for the Mammal Society as an Information Officer and is a keen scuba diver.

@charmarshall3

Georgie Lamb

Originally from a small village in Wales, Georgie moved to Liverpool to study a degree in Geography. Her love for nature has only continued to grow, despite now living in the city.

Instagram @georggieanne

Matt Livesey

Matt is a 19 year old aspiring wildlife photographer from Hertfordshire, currently studying at University in Durham. He picked up a camera for the first time five years ago, prior to which he went birdwatching for seven years.

Zach Haynes

Zach is a passionate Yorkshire based naturalist, blogger and photographer. Aiming to raise awareness of the importance of the natural world he aspires to work in conservation.

Twitter: @nerdboy386
Website: Yearofnature.blogspot.com

Meet the Team

Meet the volunteers behind each issue of new nature

James Common

Editor-in-chief

@CommonByNature

www.commonbynature.com

Alexandra Pearce

Managing Editor

@PearceAlex1

www.alexandra-pearce.com

Emily Pettiford

Web Manager

@Pocketearth

www.pocketfullofearth.com

Elliot Dowding

Content Editor

@wildlife_words

www.wildlifeandwords.wordpress.com

Harriet Gardiner

Creative Director

@harrietsagardiner

www.harrietgardiner.com

Alice Johnson

Features Editor

@AJohnson2810

www.naturenattering.wordpress.com

Emma-Jo Pereira

Social Media Manager

@emmajopereira

@emmajo.pereira

Scott Thomson

Content Editor

@Scott1993

wildchatblog.wordpress.com

Contact Us

Let us know what you thought about this issue of New Nature, or what you would like to see in future issues.

We are always on the lookout for young writers, photographers and artists. Please get in touch if you are interested in submitting work.

editorial.newnature@gmail.com

www.newnature.co.uk

/NewNatureMag
@NewNature_Mag
/NewNature_Mag