

# New Nature

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Images: Sunset, Donna Tomlinson; Sheep, Camila Peñafiel; Bird, Georgia Locock; Jellyfish, Alexander Cahlenstein; Footpath, Sophie May Lewis; Fish and Diver, Jack Perks; Goldfinch, Matt Livesey.



WELCOME TO

# New Nature

It's been a very busy time lately with lots of interesting environmental news being released this month. Don't worry if you missed any of it though as Abby Condliffe gives us 10 easy ways to help the environment (p.26) and our own Emma Pereira recaps the government's 25 Year Environment Plan (p.41) and looks at how connected we are to the natural world. Lucia Speroni rounds everything off by looking at the impact of plastic in the North Atlantic (p.30).

We still have our regular features too, Alice Johnson interviews wildlife photographer and filmmaker, Jake Perks (p.38), and finds out what it takes to make it in the industry. For photography a little closer to home we have Matt Livesey extolling the benefits of winter photography and why we should be braving the cold for the perfect shot (p.44).

Elliot Dowding tells us what fantastic wildlife there is to look out for in the month of February (p.8) and why he thinks the earwig is an underrated species. Let us know on our Facebook page if you agree with his choice! That is only the tip of the iceberg though as we have articles on everything from rural sheep farming in Scotland (p.22), to urban foxes in Bristol (p.14). It is another fantastic edition and we are hugely grateful to everyone who has written for us this month. So, if it is cold and miserable outside, go put the kettle on and settle down for an enthralling and entertaining read!

Scott Thomson  
Content Editor

Say Hello

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   @newnature\_mag

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## On the Cover

Our wonderful cover shot this month was taken by Jack Hendy.

Jack Hendy is a Natural History photography graduate who has a love for all things macro. Whatever the weather you will most likely find him exploring lowland heathland in search of exciting flora and fauna.

Find him on Twitter @jackhendyphoto and check out his photos at [www.jackhendyphotography.co.uk](http://www.jackhendyphotography.co.uk)

## New Nature Writing Competition 2018

New Nature is launching its first nature writing competition! All entries will be judged by the New Nature team and Robert Macfarlane.


Pieces of work can be written in any style, but must be a maximum of 600 words and focus on the subject matter: The Embodiment of Spring

Closing date: 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018. Winners to be revealed in our June issue and on our website, however all winners will be contacted beforehand. Participants must be aged 30 and under.

### Prizes

**1st prize** – 1 pair of Viking Vistron binoculars, courtesy of Viking Optical, and a special signed edition of Robert Macfarlane's new book 'The Lost Words'

[www.vikingoptical.co.uk](http://www.vikingoptical.co.uk)

 @RobGMacfarlane

**2nd prize** – Free entry to the British Wildlife Centre for two people

[www.britishwildlifecentre.co.uk](http://www.britishwildlifecentre.co.uk)

**3rd prize** – Vouchers courtesy of British Wildlife Gifts

[www.britishwildlifegifts.co.uk](http://www.britishwildlifegifts.co.uk)

All winners will also get a unique New Nature logo for use on their website or blog pages.

### How to submit your work

Work must be submitted by **6pm March 31<sup>st</sup> 2018** by email to **editorial.newnature@gmail.com**. The email must contain your full name, place of residence, age email address. Please attach your piece as a word document. Please send your piece within an email which has writing competition and your full name and age in the subject space, ie:

Subject: Writing Competition Andrew Aardvark 21

Andrew Aardvark

21

Cornwall

[A.Aardvark@gmail.com](mailto:A.Aardvark@gmail.com)

Any submissions without these details will not be accepted.

Good luck!

### Judge

Award-winning writer Dr Robert Macfarlane has produced many bestselling books about landscape, nature and language, including *The Wild Places*, *The Old Ways* and *Landmarks*. His most recent book, *The Lost Words: A Spell Book* (2017) with the artist Jackie Morris is being used in schools up and down the country. He is a founding trustee of the youth conservation charity Action For Conservation. His work has been adapted for radio, film and television and Robert also turned his hand to presenting for BBC 2's *Natural World* in 2010. He has experience as a judge, sitting on the panel for the 2007 and 2013 Man Booker Prize for Fiction. Robert is a Fellow at Emmanuel College, Cambridge University.



The gift that gives



British  
Wildlife  
Centre







What a cute little owl  
from @Naturenortheast



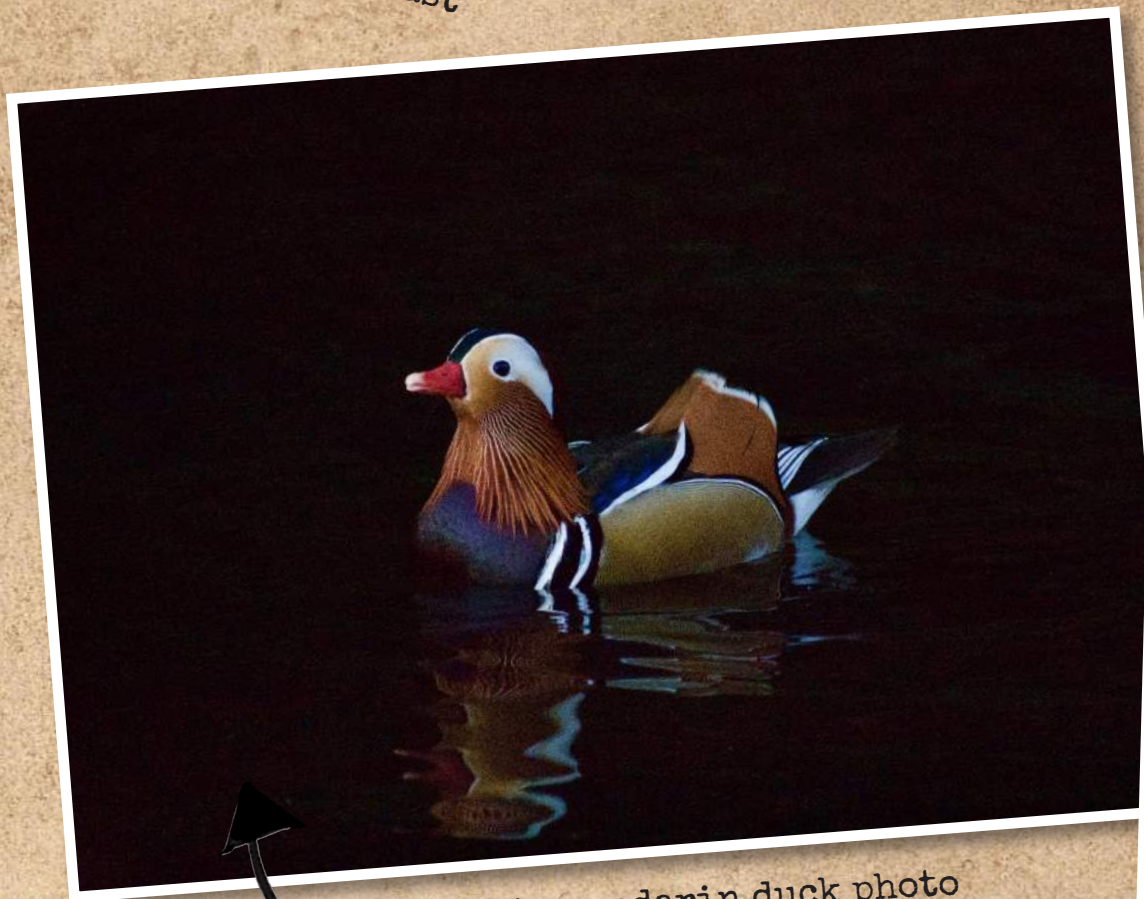
Left: A sneaky fox in  
the snow shot from  
Michael Heron  
Right: Caught in  
action, this amazing  
great tit by Elaine  
Porteous



# Readers' Photographs



A very lucky vole  
photography from  
the talented Will  
Bonding



A fantastic mandarin duck photo  
by @naturalsphere

Roe in the snow by Andy @  
GeordieCarlisle



What a beautiful  
nuthatch from Kerrie  
Hillebrandt



# What to Watch for in FEBRUARY

Words by Elliot Dowding

February is an odd time; with both new life beginning as spring begins to wake, and death as wild animals fail to make it through the 'hunger-gap' - that period before the bounty of spring when winter food resources and fat reserves begin to run out. Flocking together is a strategy used by many bird species during the winter to aid survival, small birds particularly benefit, including finches such as redpolls. The lesser redpoll is resident in the UK but is rather inconspicuous in the breeding season. At this time of year however, it can be found in flocks containing as many as several hundred birds. These flocks move through woodland canopies feeding on the seeds of trees like birch, alder and larch and are easily missed as they often feed silently. If you do find a group of redpolls, be sure to check for the less common mealy redpoll, which is larger and paler and may be hidden among its congeners.

Although most birds of prey are largely solitary outside the breeding season, several species do form winter roosts together; where sometimes many tens of individuals of one or more species congregate in trees, bushes or reedbeds. Red kites are one such species, and with their increasing population winter roosts of this species can be quite large. If you don't mind getting cold, it could be worth waiting at a known or likely site at dusk to watch as these impressive birds glide in to spend the night.

One of the earliest and most conspicuous signs of spring is the ripening of hazel catkins, also called 'lamb's-tails' on the otherwise bone-bare trees.

These pretty clusters of dangling yellow flowers release vast quantities of pollen into the winter wind, to be carried across the land and hopefully find a female flower. It is harder to spot the female styles, which appear as tiny tufts of red spikes on the tips of certain buds.

A visit to an inland lake or reservoir in February could be rewarding for several reasons. As the temperature rises, so do the amorous feelings within the feathered breasts of great-crested grebes. In Britain at least, there are few finer or more joyful spectacles than the courtship display of this pretty water-bird - it is quite a delight to watch them mimic each other's movements then rise out of the water to shake their heads with beaks full of weed. Soon, they will construct their floating nests, although another bird is already ahead of them (and above them) - the grey heron. This common, tall and angular bird will begin courtship and nest repairs this month, and by the end of it may well have a clutch of fresh-laid eggs.

Amphibians also begin getting busy this month, as toads, frogs and newts start to emerge from their winter sleep and make their way back to their breeding pools. For children and adults alike, the discovery of the very first mass of floating frogspawn is cause enough to crack a smile, knowing that spring cannot now be far away. Keep an eye out also for the long, beaded strings of toadspawn and the single eggs of newts which are secreted beneath the curled-up leaf of a water plant, although it may be easier to spot the adults.



# Where to Visit

## PAGHAM HARBOUR

Words by Mya Bambrick



It's a winter's day at one of my favourite nature reserves, Pagham Harbour, in West Sussex. The weather is rather dull but the amount of birds that flock here are sure to brighten the day. On the horizon what looks like 'hundreds of black dots' gracefully and slowly swirl back and forth, looking like a distant starling murmuration. The flock splits into two groups, with one heading my way. These are brent geese, which migrate to the reserve every winter. Their presence is sometimes apparent before you actually see them, with hundreds of geese creating quite a noise with their loud honking. The two groups had now scattered and about 20 landed on the water in front of me. Up close they are a smart-looking bird with a black neck and head, grey back and adults having a white patch on their neck. These birds always liven up the reserve in winter as they never seem to stay in one place for very long - after a while on the water they lift up into the sky and the smaller groups join into one. They fly over the trees behind

me, inland, and I later find the flock of about 200 on a field near the car park feasting on grass.

Pagham is a great place to see a variety of waders and one that is unmistakable is the oystercatcher. Its bright orange beak, pink-coloured legs and black and white plumage contrasts against the mudflats where they are generally found. Through my scope I can see about four, with one probing the mud for any tiny morsels it can find, it then scuttles along to find somewhere else to feed. They normally feed on mussels and cockles as well as worms, which is what they mainly eat whilst feeding on the mudflats. As the weather starts to turn and rain begins to fall, a flock of over 200 waders lift up into the sky, looking like shining diamonds as their wings glint in the remaining sunlight. The flock contains two different species of wader, one being slightly bigger than the other. The first species is grey plover, which you can tell from its distinctive 'black



armpits' and the smaller waders are dunlin. After a fly-around the flock lands, which allows me to get a better look at them. In the winter some people would say the grey plover is quite a boring-looking bird with grey-brown feathers, which contrasts to their summer plumage of a striking jet black face, neck and undersides. The group that I can see are just standing there on the mud looking a bit sorry for themselves in the now heavy rain.

The much more active wader of the group is the dunlin which tends to forage in groups of about four or five, moving almost frantically amongst the dips and inlets of the harbour. With its slightly curved bill it jabs the mud before scampering off and then feeding again somewhere else. In winter, the dunlin also has grey plumage but with a white underside, compared to the black belly and brown back that it has in summer. With the small group of dunlin now out of sight, a curlew comes into view.

This well-known bird is renowned for its down curved, long bill and brown streaky plumage. Its spine-tingling, bubbling call is a soundtrack for spring with our uplands, coasts, marshes and moorlands never being the same without its distinctive and even haunting call. Therefore, the curlew's call is probably one of the most well-known of any UK bird.

After another quick scan around with my scope I spot lots of redshank, ringed plover, cormorants, four little grebe and a couple of little egret. In my opinion the little egret is quite an underrated bird, the one that I can see slowly pulls its leg out of the water, placing its yellow foot gracefully in front of the other. With its snowy-white feathers I can see its eyes are fixed on something beneath the water: probably its lunch! The little egret used to be a scarce bird here in the UK, but now, after their relatively recent colonisation, they are a common bird on our coasts as well as some inland wetland sites.

After a great day birding at Pagham I eventually drag myself away, with the sound of honking brent geese, the loud piping call of the redshank and squabbling black-headed gulls echoing in the distance.





# EARWIG

Words by Elliot Dowding

Underrated  
Species



As you read this there are countless mothers caring for countless young in little holes under the ground. I'm not talking about Hobbits, or any mammal, but an insect with a peculiarly strong maternal instinct. If you were to go digging in the soil right now, in February, there is a chance that you may come across a very small chamber, perhaps under a rock or in the abandoned tunnel of a larger creature. In this chamber, you would see a female earwig (most likely of the species *Forficula auricularia*, the most common of the four native UK earwigs) guarding her clutch of about 50 eggs.

Earwigs are insects which closely resemble beetles, but are in fact classified within the order Dermaptera, meaning 'skin-wings', and most of the 2,000 or so species found around the globe possess a pair of pincer-like cerci at the tip of their abdomen. Being very common in most habitats, including within houses, as well as their small size, brown colouration and nocturnal habits has meant that they are underrated – and certainly overlooked – by most people. However, they do exhibit behaviour which is unusual among insects and which usually goes on unseen to human eyes – that of maternal care of their offspring.

Many insects have adopted the strategy of producing vast quantities of eggs or offspring throughout the breeding season in the hope that at least a few might survive to adulthood; in most cases very little or even no care is put into caring for these young. Earwigs have struck on a different strategy; one

which is much more in line with our own. In the autumn, a pregnant female earwig will find a safe place, usually underground, in which to lay her eggs. Rather than leaving these eggs or dying, the female will then spend the entire winter alongside her eggs. She tends them throughout the cold months, turning them and cleaning them to prevent fungal infection.

When spring arrives and the temperature begins to rise, the mother earwig will spread out her eggs into one layer so that they can hatch into tiny replicas of herself. Once they have hatched she will continue to guard them from predators and provide them with food until they reach maturity after about a month. She may then go on to produce a second brood during the summer.



Image by Tom Oates

This long period of care for their offspring clearly pays off, as earwigs are hugely successful as a group wherever they are found. They occur on every continent but Antarctica, they are so numerous as to be serious agricultural pests in some countries and their omnivorous diet and generalist habitat requirements means that they can thrive in a wide variety of climates and environments. Despite the fierce-looking pincers (which are used in mating and defence) they pose no threat to humans and are both vital components of the ecosystem and really awesome animals in their own right. Next time you spot one, why not take a closer look and appreciate the beauty and the complex, caring behaviour of this common insect.



# Foxes:

*the reality behind the rogue*

Words by Edward Grierson

It goes without saying that in the space of a century, our understanding of our fellow creatures has improved no end. Even so, there still are some creatures to which we simply can't shake off yesteryear's prejudices. And one such creature is the red fox.

More than any British animal, our last remaining canid is subject to great amounts of hysteria. And as a farmer's son, who has lived in the countryside all his life, it is my intention to dispel these myths, and hopefully shed some light on this misunderstood creature.

Let's start with the most persistent myth: that foxes kill more than they eat. It's understandable how this misconception arose; plenty of farmers have beheld multiple chickens killed in one fell swoop; my own farm is no exception. But is it really what it looks like? No. While a fox will not eat all the chickens it kills in one sitting, it doesn't let them go to waste. Most food that they don't eat is stored, to ensure there is a supply of food in colder months. This 'caching'

behaviour is common among carnivores, as it is more economical than multiple killings of individual prey animals.

Nor is the number of foxes exploding, and certainly not since the Hunting Ban, as some people claim. In fact, the trend for Britain's fox population has actually been relatively stable for the past twenty years, at around 250,000. Predator control, both hunting and shooting, doesn't make much difference either: the Oxford Wildlife Conservation Research Unit estimates that creating a meaningful reduction in the fox population would require killing two-thirds of Britain's foxes annually.

What about Britain's urban foxes? Again, there's a lot of hysteria surrounding them. Their presence in these areas, and incidents of foxes attacking people, have nothing to do with the Hunting Ban: foxes have been present in British cities for over a century before the Ban was established. Rather than increasing, their populations have fluctuated throughout the years;

in fact the Bristol fox population, the highest in Britain, is still recovering from an outbreak of saprotrophic mange in the 1990s, which wiped out 95% of their population - which, I should stress, there is very little risk of transmission from foxes to people or domestic animals. As for the danger urban foxes pose to people, while some people have been attacked by foxes, these occur very rarely, especially when compared to the 5-6,000 people on average who are hospitalised each year from dog attacks. Attacks by foxes have simply gained more media coverage, which in most cases has considerably sensationalised the danger they represent.

Naturally, there will be people whose opinions differ from mine. Whether they are rich or poor, whether they live in the city or the countryside, and whether their traditions are recent or centuries-old, is not important. What is important is that the fox is not some ruthless killer with an agenda, but simply another animal, and one we can certainly learn to live with.



Diptera – the true flies. Many people shy away from this vast, diverse and exciting order of invertebrates due to the complications in identification. The same also goes for Hymenoptera, and micro-Lepidoptera. But how about if I told you that the larvae of some of these orders, and others, were much easier to find and identify than many people would assume?

The immature stages of most invertebrates are incredibly vulnerable to predators. Birds simply can't resist the juicy larvae of moths, beetles or sawflies. Yet some species have developed a way to keep their larvae out of the mouths of birds – by spending the

whole or part of their larval stages safely tucked within the leaf on which they feed. This makes them considerably more noticeable, and usually the species can be told by the shape and the characteristics of the mine. Great for an amateur entomologist like me!

If you're keen to identify the leaf-mines you've found, there are a number of websites that you can use. The two that I call upon most frequently are [www.ukflymines.co.uk](http://www.ukflymines.co.uk) and [www.leafmines.co.uk](http://www.leafmines.co.uk) (both of which are ordered by host plant). One of the reasons that leaf-mines are relatively easy to identify is because they are often host-specific, and in most cases plant species will not have an overwhelming



Image by Barry Warrington

number of species. Exceptions are abundant broadleaved trees like oak and birch; however if your mine is distinctive enough then you shouldn't find it too difficult to narrow it down to at least a few species.

Although there are a few different insect orders that mine leaves, the ones that are most commonly encountered are the Agromyzid flies and micro-moths. Micro-moths are often encountered slightly more often than other orders, and include some of the most obvious leaf-miners in the UK. An example of this is the horse chestnut leaf-miner, *Cameraria ohridella*. Since it was first discovered in the UK in Wimbledon in 2002, it has spread rapidly and is now a regular feature on horse chestnut trees across southern England and Wales at least. Despite the existence of several hypotheses, the exact reason why the distribution of this species has expanded so much is still unknown. It is easy to spot as the larvae can form obvious and massive brown blotches that take up most of the large horse chestnut leaf when the larva is fully grown. It is not uncommon to find trees that have almost every leaf covered in these conspicuous mines!

Another leaf-mining moth species is the very common golden pigmy *Stigmella aurella*. This is a moth

that mines the leaves of brambles, and given the abundance of the food-plant it is unsurprising that this species is also very widespread across the UK. Surprisingly for such a ubiquitous plant there are only 20 species of mining invertebrates that have been recorded using bramble leaves (compared to 45 on oak and an impressive 68 on birch), and this species is easy to separate from other bramble-miners. While the basal half of the adult's wings are a shiny metallic golden colour, the mine itself is a bold silver corridor which stands out from the rest of the leaf. Often the mine has a purple border.

Agromyzidae are a large family of Diptera, most of which are leaf-miners. The adults being tiny and usually dark-coloured, would otherwise go unnoticed if it were not for their sometimes conspicuous leaf-mines. For just over a year, a recording scheme especially for the Agromyzidae family has been set up. Led by Barry Warrington, there is no better person to sum up why the Agromyzidae are a family of flies that ought to garner the attention of recorders:

"The National Agromyzidae Recording Scheme was set up in December 2016, with one of its aims being that of gathering records to help gain a greater

understanding of these fascinating little flies. Over 400 species have been recorded in the UK, many of which can be determined based on the host plant and appearance of the larval mine."

"All records are of equal importance, regardless of how common or rare a species may be, as the data really helps increase our knowledge of these insects, in terms of distribution and population trends, along with life habits and host plants utilised."

"Many leaf-mines can be recorded in the average garden and back in 2007, a species new to the UK was discovered in a garden in Hampshire, so why not get out there and see if you can collate some Agromyzidae records, you never know what you may find!"

With the very realistic prospect of a new species for your county or even the country, what more motivation do you need to get out and record this family of flies, and other leaf-miners? Many families have verifiers on iRecord ([www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/](http://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/)) including the Agromyzidae. A list of county moth recorders can be found on the Butterfly Conservation website. Good luck finding leaf-mines during 2018, the recording schemes and county recorders would value your records!

Words by James McCulloch



# Urban Meets Wild

The word 'rambling' normally conjures images of countryside strolls or forest trails, far from the haze and havoc of the city. Sure, strolling around London can be nice, but it's not exactly your top pick for a seven mile weekend wander, is it? Well, it just might be once you discover the Capital Ring trail like I have.

The Capital Ring is a 78 mile walking route that forms a complete loop around London. It's divided into 15 walkable sections of between four to nine miles long, each one easy to conquer in a few hours. The trail links together London's finest – and sometimes obscure – natural and cultural sites, from sprawling parks and ancient woodlands to garden cemeteries and heritage-listed buildings. Included in the Ring are popular green spaces like Richmond Park,

Walthamstow Marshes, the Great North Wood, the Welsh Harp Reservoir and the Grand Union Canal, amongst other surprising delights.

**Section 1, Woolwich to Falconwood**, starts south-east of the city at the Woolwich Foot Tunnel, adjacent to the River Thames. You'd be forgiven for feeling a bit sceptical at this starting mark. Though it has an interesting industrial and military history, Woolwich isn't exactly the leafiest area of London. But as you follow the striking 'Capital Ring' signposts along the trail, you'll soon find yourself walking through beautiful green spaces like Maryon Park and the ancient Oxleas Wood, and past fascinating cultural sites like Charlton House and Severndroog Castle. You'll begin to understand what the London Walkers Forum did, back when they officiated the trail in

2005. Our capital is a wonderful thriving ecosystem, and walking is the best way to experience it.

If you're keen to explore the Capital Ring, you don't have to start with Section 1. Part of the beauty of the Ring is that each section begins and ends near a Tube or railway station, so you can take your pick. When I first discovered the trail with my boyfriend, we began with the section that was closest to where we lived – **Section 12, Highgate to Stoke Newington**. Shortly into the journey, we found ourselves ambling down Parkland Walk: a former railway line that was abandoned during the Second World War and has now been turned into London's longest nature reserve. It's a fascinating example of urban meeting wild, and ignited our love affair with the Capital Ring.

# Along London's Capital Ring

Since then, we've completed eight of the 15 sections and often invite friends on the walks with us. Meeting at the pub for a pint is a fun way to catch up, but trail walking is a healthy alternative, offering a big dose of nature and plenty of conversation stimulus from the sites along the way. And of course, you can still celebrate with a well-deserved pint at the end of the walk!

Of the eight sections we've completed, we've had some clear highlights. **Section 11, Hendon to Highgate**, takes you through the ancient oak and hornbeam woodlands of Highgate Wood and Queens Wood, alive with over 72 species of bird, grey squirrels and even a few bats. **Section 12, Highgate to Stoke Newington**, finishes in Abney Park Cemetery, an eerily glorious garden cemetery that's also a nature reserve. Where

life and death intertwine, it's striking enough to warrant a visit all on its own.

**Section 7, Richmond Bridge to Osterley Lock**, is a beautiful riverside walk that we enjoyed on a late summer's day that passes through Syon Park and finishes along the Grand Union Canal. And **Section 13, Stoke Newington to Hackney Wick**, introduced us to the Middlesex Filter Beds. The filter beds were built in 1852 to remove impurities from the River Lea, but were turned into a wildlife reserve in 1988, now hosting more than 200 species of plants and birds like the reed warbler and the green woodpecker.

But don't just take my word for it. Whether you're a London local or an upcoming visitor, spend a half-day exploring the Capital Ring yourself. You can download

PDF maps from the Transport for London website that provide step-by-step guides to each of the sections, including interesting 'Did You Know' tidbits along the way. Or, ditch the guide and let the signposts lead the way (though I'd recommend having the guide as a backup – some sections are more clearly signposted than others).

While city landscapes often lead us to believe that civilisation has replaced wilderness, the Capital Ring trail proves otherwise. So many sites along the trail are examples of nature being reclaimed, protected and celebrated. The wild world merges with the urban in beautiful and fascinating ways, reminding us that cities can be a part of nature, not always a separate or opposing entity. And when we take the time to explore and enjoy these trails, we're a part of it, too.

Words and Images by Kahli Scott





# An Uneasiness Of Winter

Words and Image by Sophie May Lewis

The window frames a perfect square of slow sky, a blank photographer's plate of mercury-grey upon which the morning develops. All is monochrome; winter is ungenerous with colour. An oil slick of light spills and eddies across the surface of clouds from the east. Unattached, loose between layers blow stray filaments, dust particles held in form by gravity of life force; birds. Gulls, sharp wings buckled by a lifetime of headwinds. Pigeons that have stolen the grey hues of the sky and hurry-panic over the horizon. An elastic flock of tits, each bound to the other to create an ever-fluctuating form greater than the individual.

These are some of my first birds of the year. The early days of 2018 were a blur of dismal days dominated

by low cloud and drizzle, chilling winds and a family bereavement. It didn't leave much capacity for noticing birds.

But then again, when I think about it, the birds were always there, even on the greyest, dampest days despite my initial inattention. There are the robins that hop into the glasshouses when I'm potting up, just to check for any bugs in the soil discarded in my wheelbarrow, and the swirl of jackdaws that flock up from the neighbouring equine pasture when disturbed by a passing tractor.

When I closed up the nursery shop at the end of the working day, I paused for a moment or two in the gathering gloom to listen to a dusk chorus, it was a

great source of solace; the sounds of spring on a winter night. In the indistinct belly of the hedge a blackbird cackle-sings, testing his voice, not the full-throated song of later seasons but a mixed vocabulary of notes and whistles and garbled clicks. Another spits a volley of alarm 'chinks' in answer, the ricochet of which is caught by other dark-thrushes and tossed through the gloaming. The sharp notes rising from fire-billed throats as bright as sound-sparks, instantly hardened to shards by the quenching of the frigid night air.

On one of these evenings it was a pair of goldcrests that held me enraptured. The two tiny fragments of bird-form were working a pine tree positioned in a large pot a few metres from the shop front. Moss green, lichen grey, a flash of gorse-gold, so close that if I held my breath I could almost imagine that I could feel the rapid fluttering of a tiny heart beneath the feathers. Theirs was a life of little consequence; they knew only light and dark, sensations of cold, or hunger or warmth. I almost envied them. I stepped closer and they flitted away into the night.

Now I think about these birds, I feel the need to go for a walk and seek them out.

In winter, it is often the heathland that I head to. The apparent bleakness of this landscape seems somehow

fitting, a stark contrast to the scenes of summer excess in which I will bask later in the year. Heather, wiry and woody, rasp-dry, leeches cold colour down from a mist-thin sky of over-washed grey. Largely I have the heath to myself, save for three black crows that loiter around the warped pines, bickering with ragged cries. The luminous-yellow gorse flowers seem drastically out of place with the time of year, their brightness almost obscene in contrast to the ash greys, ironstone browns and chromatic greens.

Part of my local patch, the heathland is close enough to reach on a short lunch-break walk any day of the week. During winter, when I find it hardest to write, the semi-wild swathes of commoner's land act as my lungs, filled with breaths of inspiration. It is where I find my words, drinking them in from the peat-earth, ore-stone and cobwebbed wood sage.

I won't go there today however, the mercury-sky of the morning has liquefied to a penetrating drizzle. I have a few small tasks to achieve, and if the weather clears I need to attend to my allotment where there is storm damage to tidy up, and my new bird feeder to fill and hang. Today, I will content myself with a window that frames a perfect square of slow sky, and with noticing birds.



# Ewe Inspire Me



Words and Images by Camila Penafiel

Journeys prompted by the  
passion for sheep

Since I was a child, my parents taught me and my two brothers to live with a passion – a hobby, a professional career, a sport, an activity, it could be anything but we just needed to find it!

Being raised close to my grandad led me to find a passion for farming. This then took me on to do a BSc in Agriculture where I specialized on sheep farming in Patagonia, a region of Chile with more than 2,000,000 sheep and more than 50% of the total sheep population in the country.

Years later, the sheep took me to Scotland. In a kind of gap year, I volunteered on a random farm on the West Coast of Scotland. But the twists and turns of life showed me that it was not just a random farm. I was in what would become, months later, my second home near Oban, and Jamie & Morag became my Scottish parents. Learning loads and absorbing new knowledge about the two sheep breeds that roam in the Scottish hills – the Scottish Blackface and the lively and active Cheviot sheep – and their special management, made me realise that suddenly the world had shrunk.

Just days after meeting Jamie & Morag, we went on a Midsummer Munro Mission where I met

(another) Jamie who, talking about sheep farming, invited me to see where he lived and the sheep and cattle that he and his wife manage. This unexpected encounter took me to the Isle of Ulva, off the west coast of the Isle of Mull in the Inner Hebrides. On Ulva, I met the native Hebridean sheep, a *wee* black Scottish wild breed that is long-legged with an intense and deep look in their eyes. Jamie's wife, Tessa McGregor, became my referee and professional mentor for my MSc in Biodiversity and Taxonomy of Plants, and also influenced my research on the Flora of Fair Isle. Again, just through the passion for sheep, life was taking me to astonishing places!

Whilst doing my research on Fair Isle, I felt in paradise. It was like everything that moves me had been put onto this remote Scottish island. Two lighthouses, with an ineffable light in-between, a wonderful flora and weather just like Patagonia. Sheep showed me another side of Fair Isle's culture; crofting – Scotland's traditional form of farming. On the hills, sheep are kept in a common, grazing on the uninhabited moorland of the north side of the isle. These are gathered in every summer (known as the "*hill caa*") and taken into the communal sheep-pen (known as "*cru*" or "*cro*") to be sheared or clipped. On the hill land, there

are only purebred Shetland sheep, but elsewhere on the crofts, other breeds can be found such as pure and cross-bred Cheviots, Texels, and Suffolks. But what happens with the wool after clipping? Apart from being made into the world famous Fair Isle knitwear, with its distinct pattern and knitting style, wool is spun. And this is where again, my journey took another direction and encounter. I ended up being the learner and friend of Stewart Thomson of Shirva, who has designed and built over 100 spinning wheels with wood salvaged from the old observatory buildings.

Being aware that sheep farming is a delicate topic amongst conservationists, ecologists, birdwatchers and even botanists like me, it's important to know what happens beyond the gate of a farm or a croft before judgments are made. There are many farmers and crofters who work for the benefit of nature in a holistic way and understand the natural environment, and they can be really open books. As Aldo Leopold in 1949 said: "we need to learn how to think like a mountain".

In my case, it was a passion for sheep that changed my life abruptly for the better. Because I believed in it, I followed it and I let myself go.







10 WAYS YOU CAN  
HELP TOWARDS  
SAVING THE  
ENVIRONMENT  
THIS YEAR

Words by Abby Condliffe

Images: Crocus, Jack Hendy; Bottles, Alan Levine.

Over the past month or so, several harrowing stories have come to light addressing the extreme difficulties faced by animals living out in the wild. These include the sincere revelations of David Attenborough on Blue Planet II that coral reefs could disappear in less than 100 years, as well as the disheartening video of the starving polar bear digging desperately through a bin in a frantic attempt to find food. If you haven't yet seen it, you really don't want to.

It's an unfortunate reality that it takes instances such as those noted to bring light to the severity of the situation, but I'm sure you'll agree that this urgently needs to change. And now. Before further implications arise. It isn't only wild animals that our rapidly altering environment is affecting and if we don't act now, at what point will we do so?



You're probably thinking, "my actions won't make a difference; it will take more than one person to change the world". You're wrong. According to the Go Green Initiative, enough electricity to power a 100 watt light bulb for four hours can be generated from the recycling of just one plastic bottle! In this case, if just one person recycles only one plastic bottle every week for a year, 208 hours of electricity can be produced for that same light bulb. What an impact from just one person! Imagine what a difference we could make collectively.

We need to take action in working towards a safer environment, better sustainability and a more promising future for ourselves and the generations beyond us.

Below, I've listed 10 simple ways you can help this year:

- Turn off the tap while brushing your teeth.
- Wrap up or put on a jumper and turn your heating down by one or two degrees.
- Wash your clothes at a lower temperature and only wash when you have a full load.
- When getting out and about, take public transport or keep fit by walking or cycling. If you must go out in the car, combine your errands in one journey where you can. If you can leave your car at home for just two days a week, you can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by an average of 1,590 pounds per year.
- Reuse and recycle whenever possible. Choose products with less packaging and drink tap water rather than buying bottled.
- Change your light bulbs to CFLs (Compact Fluorescent light bulbs) which last 10 times longer and use at least two thirds less energy. These can be picked up online for less than £2.00. Bargain!
- Slow down and drive at 60mph rather than 70. This will save your pennies as well as the environment as you will save four miles per gallon. Accelerating and braking too hard also reduces fuel economy so drive sensibly.
- Turn off lights when you're not in the room or create an ambiance with candle lighting.
- Turn off appliances when they're not in use and unplug where possible to prevent 'phantom energy.'
- Take a brisk shower rather than a long one or a leisurely bath.

IT'S TIME TO MAKE A CHANGE. LET'S DO THIS TOGETHER. LET'S DO THIS NOW.



Words and Images by  
Georgia Locock

# Dangers of a Journey South:

Illegal Migratory Bird Slaughter in Cyprus

In the distance, the sweet call of the blackcap was being projected through an MP3 decoy. It was 3am and five of us were lugging over a ploughed field in the direction of the tape lure, as we approached a shrubby area the noise got louder and louder. We were in an area known for bird trapping.

The island of low trees and shrubs within an area of open fields, where the traps were set, was around 200 metres from a house. We couldn't afford to make any unnecessary noise. One of us went to keep look-out in case the trapper came back and we all began looking for limesticks. Speed and efficiency was everything. This was my first time out in the field since arriving on Cyprus. Beforehand, I'd seen images of birds entangled on limesticks, but a thought then occurred to me: 'What the hell would I do when I found a bird attached to one?'

A lesser whitethroat. A species I've seen in the UK before. This one was smothered in the gooey slime of a limestick. Its head was wrapped around the stick, with its beak embedded. It was pitch black and we couldn't use torches as we'd attract too much attention. Instead, we carefully shined a dim light to work out what state the bird was in and where to start in an attempt to release it. Submerged in the paste, it seemed there was little chance. The bird had seemingly been stuck for a long time, but it persisted with the odd twitch in an attempt to release itself. Like a snare, the more it tried to escape and pull itself away, the more it entangled itself. Its delicate legs were clotted.

After a careful extraction, we had removed the bird but it was barely moving. It had been there too long, although the bird was free its legs were still cemented in the evil substance on the stick. I can't think of a more brutal way for a bird to die.

Last September, I spent six days on Cyprus investigating and learning more about the illegal slaughter of migratory birds that pass over the island. That night we collected around 150 limesticks. The limesticks are made using a small stick, about the right size to place in a bush, then covered in an incredibly strong and sticky substance which acts as a glue to trap birds when they land on the stick. Trappers will place multiple sticks within an area alongside an MP3 player as a decoy, which usually plays the song of blackcaps. Such calls attract birds to the area, where they then find themselves surrounded by limesticks. Once stuck, they can only wait until they are released by the trapper the next morning.

This illegal trapping then results in the birds being sold on to restaurants, where they're sold to Cypriots for large amounts of money as a traditional, but illegal, 'delicacy' known as 'Ambelopoulia'. This black-market trade has been illegal for over 40 years, yet it continues as many Cypriots still believe the practice to be traditional and it is big business for some trappers. Back in 2016, on a British Military Base in Cyprus, it was estimated that 800,000 birds were killed during the autumn using limesticks and mist nets.

Most birds are caught during the autumn migration period when birds across Europe travel south to wintering grounds. Many of the songbird species which are caught would no doubt be familiar to the British public, for example two of the most common are the robin and blackcap. However, those on the frontline on Cyprus are a group known as CABS, which stands for Committee Against Bird Slaughter. They intervene and fight against illegal bird slaughter across Europe.

Despite the huge number of birds that have been slaughtered across Cyprus, including on British Military Land, change and progress is happening. CABS volunteers told us that even compared to 2016, the number of trapping sites has drastically dropped, especially on the British Base. This is believed to be due to the change in attitudes from those who police and manage the British Military Base on Cyprus.

Another example of impressive work being done in the fight against the slaughter of migratory birds on Cyprus is by Birdlife Cyprus through their educational response. From lesson plans to children's board games, they are doing everything possible to engage with younger generations to thaw-out this cruel and barbaric tradition.

You can view the educational films targeted at children in the UK that I helped to create and present on my visit here - [www.chrispackham.co.uk/news/cyprus-massacre-on-migration-2017](http://www.chrispackham.co.uk/news/cyprus-massacre-on-migration-2017)



# MICROPLASTICS

## CAUSING DEEP TROUBLE IN THE NORTHEAST ATLANTIC OCEAN

*Words by Lucia Speroni*

Imagine traveling to a habitat where light is absent and the pressure and temperature make it impossible for human beings to survive. Life takes on weird forms where creatures display bioluminescence, big pseudo-eyes and other fantastic adaptations. It is not another galaxy, but the deep sea.

“The deep sea ecosystem is considered ‘out of sight, out of mind’,” comments scientist Winnie

Courtene-Jones. Her scientific curiosity pushed her to take a peek into the deep waters of the Rockall Trough in the Northeast Atlantic Ocean. Her team at the Scottish Association for Marine Science took samples of water and studied animals living 2,200m deep, that’s 23 Big Ben’s stacked one on top of the other!

Courtene-Jones was astonished by her findings. It was not a new form of life that she found, but a signature of human life: plastic fibres. Acrylic and polyester fibres have made their way into the deep sea. In fact, there is a similar amount of plastic fibres in the deep waters of the Northeast Atlantic Ocean as there is in surface waters. Plastic fibres are considered microplastics, tiny pieces of plastic that look like food to small invertebrates that live in the deep ocean.

The team was able to collect several species that are inhabitants of the Rockall Trough in their underwater expedition. Some of these invertebrates feed on small specks that have settled on the bottom, such as the deep-sea brittle star. Others, such as molluscs, prey on burrowing animals like bivalves. Once in the laboratory, the scientists analyzed what these animals were feeding on. All of the species studied were found to have ingested plastic fibres, regardless of their way of feeding. “Our findings show that despite the great depth, the concentrations of microplastics ingested by organisms living here are comparable to coastal species,” explains Courtene-Jones. She goes on to say that “While it wasn’t possible to study the impacts of the

microplastics on these organisms, this is something we’d like to do in the future”.

Rockall Trough is a remote location and the conditions on the surface are rough, as Courtene-Jones explains: “Sampling the deep sea has its challenges, our team goes out on a research cruise only once a year, during this time you pray for good weather, as if the waves are too big we can’t deploy the equipment to collect samples and you only have a small window for this. Sampling is also a long process, it takes about five to six hours for the sled to get down to the sea bed, collect the sample and then be recovered to the surface”.

How these tiny plastic fibres make it all the way to the deep sea is yet to be figured out. They could come from larger plastics that get fragmented by the action of the sea, or may originally have been that small. For example, a lot of the clothes we wear today are made of plastic fibres. Synthetic clothes can shed acrylic and polyester fibres in each wash. It is plausible that the presence of plastic fibres in deep waters is not unique to Rockall Trough. Water-ways are connected and currents can help debris travel between the most remote locations. We are ultimately dealing with a one-ocean situation.

Research regarding plastic pollution is a developing story. In the meantime, we can help reduce the amount of plastic that reaches the ocean by avoiding single-use plastic items, checking labels on products we use every day, like clothing, and staying informed!



# Fiona Harvey

Award-winning journalist, Fiona Harvey, has covered some of the most important environmental stories of our lifetime. Now working as an environmental journalist for the Guardian, Fiona talks to Alex Pearce about her career, interviewing David Attenborough and how she thinks we should tackle the future of our environment.



*AP: Hi Fiona! You've had a very varied career. What has led you to environmental journalism?*

FH: Writing about the environment takes in everything - politics, science, business, economics, the future of the world, the future of people - it has everything you could want to write about, as a journalist. There are so many different issues within environment journalism, from pollution and climate change to overfishing, resource depletion and population. What could be more varied?

*AP: What has been the highlight of your career so far?*

FH: There have been so many, it is impossible to choose. I was at the Copenhagen climate conference in 2009, the Paris climate conference in 2015, both of which changed the course of world events, and will continue to do so for years to come. I've interviewed people such as Ban Ki-moon, Tony Blair, Al

Gore, many others. Perhaps the most notable recently was David Attenborough - he is amazing. It was shortly before Blue Planet II came out, and he was going back to the studio that afternoon to record the voiceover. He told me about his fears about plastic pollution - fascinatingly, he told me how as a schoolboy his science master had brought a piece of plastic into the class one day and told them how wonderful it was as a material - "this is the future - it's indestructible!" - and within his lifetime that material had turned from a blessing to a curse. It was wonderful to get the scoop on that, because of course afterwards Blue Planet II became the most watched programme of the year.

*AP: Journalism has changed a lot due to recent technological advances. What do you think the future is for how we share our environmental news?*

FH: When I first started in journalism, quite by accident I ended up writing about the internet. This was in 1994. So, I have seen the revolution in technology in journalism from the very outset. I think the most important thing we need to keep sight of is that if we want good journalism - journalism that holds power to account, that investigates all of the many problems that we see around us - we have to pay for it. The idea of paying for good journalism didn't seem remarkable when I started out. It does now. And who benefits from a situation in which journalists

are not paid? Only the people and organisations with something to hide. It's great for them.

*AP: What does a typical day look like for you?*

FH: One of the wonderful things about journalism is that there are no typical days. Let me describe a week I had a while ago. One day I was in parliament, talking to ministers and civil servants, the next day I was on a farm watching piglet being born, and the day after I was at a conference with scientists. It's always fascinating.

*AP: What recommendations would you give to a young person interested in a career such as yours?*

FH: Be prepared to spend the time needed to learn your way around. I spent five years on trade journals before I joined a national newspaper, and spent time working part-time and freelance while I worked my way up. Sometimes, I fear, people think you walk straight into jobs. You don't, generally. You need experience and to prove yourself.

*AP: You have reported on a wide range of environmental issues, what do you feel is the most pressing issue we are currently facing? Are there any stories you have found particularly difficult?*

FH: It is impossible to say what is the most pressing issue - there are many issues that are threatening us.

Plastics in the sea, as I mentioned earlier, is a huge issue. But so is climate change. So is the issue of how we feed 9 billion people. So is water, because we are failing to use this resource sensibly. We need to look at these things as a whole - we will not solve the world's problems if we only focus on one or two of them. We need to see how interconnected they are and take that interconnectedness as our starting point.

*AP: I imagine it can become a little disheartening reporting on environmental issues regularly; how do you stay upbeat?*

FH: My maxim has always been that rather than simply presenting readers with problems, we should also present them with the potential solutions. There are nearly always potential solutions - for example, in the case of climate change, that would be reducing greenhouse gas emissions. There are ways of doing that. As a journalist, whenever I write a story about a problem I like to make reference to the potential solutions as well.

*AP: How do you feel about the future of our environment?*

FH: Without the environment, we don't have a future, so let's try to take care of it.

Thanks! To read more from Fiona, check out her work: [www.theguardian.com/profile/fiona-harvey](http://www.theguardian.com/profile/fiona-harvey) or follow her on twitter @fionaharvey



# A FOCUS ON NATURE:

## Our Campaign

### #NowforNature

AFON's Andreas Fopp gives the lowdown on what's been happening with our campaign, #NowforNature, and explains how you can get involved.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2017, #NowforNature closed a chapter. Indicative of the young people it represents, turning one year old should be met with momentous celebration. But irrespective of whether a year or a day has passed, the campaign strives to promote the values and initiatives of young ecologists, environmentalists and naturalists on a daily basis. As our former associate director, Matt Williams, wrote of the campaign launch:

“And if you have or know of an amazing project run by a young person or people that's helping to secure nature's future right now, tell us. We want to show those with the power to make decisions that young people are leading by example.”  
(30.11.2016, *Now for Nature*)

Through #NowforNature, we aim to promote the dreams, goals and aspirations of our members in regard to wildlife and the environment, and showcase how young people are leading the way in achieving these goals. And to make us all stop and think: what are we doing, in our everyday lives, now to help nature and forwards conservation?

#NowforNature was born from a recognition that there has been a shift in how young people view conservation, especially in light of recent political events. Social media has aided and enabled our chorus of members from across the world, and has vastly improved our ability to transcend time and physical distance. We have become witnesses of environmental injustice, en-masse migrations of fauna and inspirational acts of empathy towards other species. In Matt Adam Williams' Wild Voices Podcast series, Blue Planet was recently discussed with the consensus being “intriguing, but could be more informative”. Not so much a knock on the show as an admission that the producers can do better and are arguably losing sight of their “blurring the line” concept, a meld of educational and entertainment. We are realising that instead of looking towards targets for 2020 or hoping for 2050, more needs to be done now. #NowforNature reflects this. Intended as a follow-on campaign from AFON's Vision for Nature endeavour, it is of paramount importance. Vision for Nature presented us with an ideal to strive for. #NowforNature presents us with an opportunity to grasp.

We encourage our members to share their work and experiences with us – whether that be practical conservation work, engagement, teaching or simply communicating their love of the natural world – using the hashtag #NowforNature on social media. We've also asked young people to make #NowforNature pledges, using specially designed 'postcards'. These were pioneered at BirdFair 2017 – a fantastic opportunity to engage with conservationists of all ages – and thanks to one of our brilliant projects officers Beth Aucott, many a postcard was filled out and signed.



A display of our Now for Nature postcards at BirdFair 2017. To date, AFON has received 55 pledges and counting. Credit: Alexandra Hoadley

The pledges are something I have found immensely fun to organise. From confronting avid carnivores about the possibility of #meatfreemondays to ruminating about more visits to nature reserves, our pledges are diverse and representative of the meaning of nature to different individuals. Following this, the campaign gained momentum in the Autumn with the launch of our Now for Nature week. Fully embracing its roots as a civic, people-orientated movement, we used our social media platforms to promote the fantastic work of young people across the world. This culminated with our advent blog series in December, which featured a blog post from one of our members every day with the theme now for nature – check them out on our website.



The #NowforNature campaign logo. Design courtesy of Matt Lissimore (@MattLissimore) featuring the silhouettes of an outstretched hand and a Red Admiral butterfly perched gently on its fingertips.

And our ambition is for the campaign to grow. Nandan Nilekani, an Indian entrepreneur who co-founded the multinational consultancy firm Infosys stated, “Slowly, ideas lead to ideology, lead to policies that lead to actions.” Hashtagging your nature-related activities (or those of others) may seem like a trivial action, but associations build over time. The more we can illustrate the passion of this global community through mediums such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, the greater the promise of making waves, whether locally, nationally or across time zones.

As I said earlier, #NowforNature offers us an opportunity to grasp; to act. And that opportunity awaits each day. Whether we choose to capture what nature means to us through a lens, pass on knowledge to other youth, engage in conservation work, learn the names of the wildflowers growing on the field opposite our house, we all have a part to play.

Get involved by sending us your pledges to @AFONature or sharing what you're doing now for nature using the hashtag!



## Mammal Mania!

The winning team of 2017's University Mammal Challenge, Nothin' But Mammals, talk about their experiences during the challenge, and their love of all things small and furry.

Hi, mammal lovers! So, the University Mammal Challenge has come to an end, and we found out that our team won the prize for the most mammals recorded outside of bulk-capture methods. For this, we definitely have to thank the infamous rabbits of UEA (University of East Anglia) – so abundant on campus that they've become the university's unofficial mascot – for providing us with no end of opportunistic mammal sightings.

Importantly, though, the challenge also gave us the opportunity to explore some of our campus' lesser-known mammals, while learning a thing or two about survey techniques along the way!

Camera traps provided a much less labour-intensive way of spotting mammals, and allowed us to see some of the larger, more elusive mammals on campus. Positioning our cameras in a couple of woodland patches, we spotted the usual suspects – rabbits and grey squirrels – as well as some less common creatures such as a hedgehog and a small group of muntjac deer. We were even lucky enough to record a family of foxes on several occasions!

By late May it was finally warm enough to get the bat detectors out to survey the bats as they came out of hibernation. This non-intrusive sampling technique gave us the rare opportunity to learn about, and practice identifying, these extraordinary flying mammals through the analysis of their echolocation calls.

In the end, rabbits, squirrels, foxes, muntjac, bats, mice, shrews, and voles were all found thriving within this relatively small patch of land, and we certainly learnt a great deal throughout our search to find them. The competition provided the perfect opportunity for us to practice old skills and learn new ones, as well as making sure that we all still made time to enjoy the outdoors and didn't go completely insane from the stresses of final-year life! For that, we'd like to say a big thank you to the Mammal Society for coordinating the University Mammal Challenge, and to Dr. Iain Barr for providing equipment and guidance along the way.

Congrats to Shawnee Wood, Eleanor Charnock, Ellen Robson, Steven Werrell and Max Crowley!

## Member's Corner

### Insta-moments

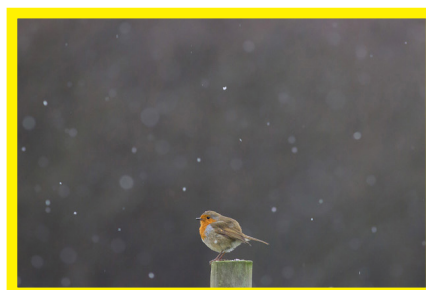
Every month, we showcase the four most popular pictures from our Instagram feed, where we post our members' brilliant photography and art. You can find us here: @afocusonnature



Teddy Walliker - @teddywalliker



Jack Perks - @fishtwitcher



Mya Bambrick - @myabambrickphotography



Kieran Nutt - @kierannutt

## Blog Highlights

Each week, we receive fantastic blogs from our members, talking about what they've been up to and topics they're passionate about. You can check the blog out here: [www.afocusonnature.org/blog](http://www.afocusonnature.org/blog) This month's highlights are based around community engagement and education...

Molly Toal spoke about the importance of an outdoor education and her work for Forest Schools: "Children who play outside are more likely to care about environmental issues, and protect nature when they are young adults"



Children at Forest School

@connelbradwell talked of his local patch in Vancouver, Canada, and inspiring the next generation of conservationists: "...never underestimate the importance and impact that local conservation and wildlife can have in engaging and inspiring 'new' people with nature"



Conservation education in Vancouver

@jackfbedford described the Great Heath project, led by the Dorset Wildlife Trust: "This [the Great Heath project] has all added up to make the Great Heath a 'Living Landscape' – a place where wildlife and people can thrive".

## How to get involved

### AFON'S mentoring scheme

We have a huge range of mentors who are passionate about sharing their knowledge and experiences, from scientists to journalists, educators to broadcasters. Interested in being a mentee? Please contact Charley at [afonmentoring@outlook.com](mailto:afonmentoring@outlook.com)

### Regional Reps

We're still on the lookout for regional reps! Our goal is to establish a network of young conservationists across the UK. This is a flexible role aimed at connecting young naturalists in your local area, organising group events and keeping up the communication on social media.

Currently, regions are broken down into:

Scotland | North East England | North West England | Yorkshire | North Lincolnshire | East Midlands | West Midlands | Wales | Eastern | London | South East | South West

Are you passionate about wildlife and conservation? Could you enthuse others to get involved on your local patch? We want to hear from you!

To find out more about the role, including how to apply please send an email to Project Officer Beth Aucott – [beth.aucott@googlemail.com](mailto:beth.aucott@googlemail.com)



# Jack Perks



New Nature's Alice Johnson talks to wildlife photographer and filmmaker Jack Perks about his work and advice he has for those wishing to pursue a similar career

Carving out a career for himself as a natural history photographer, Jack Perks has taken some extraordinary images and film, allowing him to stand out in this competitive industry. Having been involved with a range of nature programmes, from *BBC Springwatch* to *Countryfile* and *The One Show*, Jack tells us about how his career has developed.

## THE BEGINNING

Having an interest in wildlife from a young age, Jack would spend time, like many of us, outside looking for wildlife from tadpoles to bullheads, but it wasn't until later when he was a little older that he picked up a camera. He said: "It's almost clichéd to say it now but I have always liked wildlife from an early age, the photography came when I was 16 and I wanted to work with animals, but didn't get the grades for a zoological course so went down the creative route instead. What I enjoyed about photography was I could work with any creature and not have to spend months of research on it – just get outdoors and get stuck in."

After studying for a degree in BA (Hons) Marine and Natural History Photography in Cornwall, he always knew that photography was a career as opposed to a hobby for him, but that the field is competitive nonetheless. Jack explained: "It was always a career choice for me; I didn't have a backup! It's far from an easy job and the money isn't fantastic but I get paid to do something that brings

me immense joy and no stress in my life. There were 47 people on my course and I think four of us are working in the industry now."

## PHOTOGRAPHY SKILLS

Jack is known for his interest and photos of freshwater fish. We asked him how it all started and what specialist equipment he uses: "I used to go fishing a lot when I was younger and really enjoyed all the different species you could target and the wildlife you'd see from the bank. As I've got older I much prefer to get in the water with the fish and just watch them, though I do still wet line occasionally. We have some remarkable species with brown trout being the most genetically diverse vertebrate in the world, coming in dozens of shapes, colours and patterns. I use a Nikon D500 in an ikelite housing which keeps the camera from getting wet! I also use GoPros quite a bit for video."

Jack's passion for freshwater fish helps encourage others to take notice of different wildlife species, not just the cute and cuddly, he explained: "Fish are the forgotten

fauna of British naturalists. We have over 400 species in the British Isles with 56 being found in freshwater. Being from Nottingham I'm about as inland as you can get, but wanted to continue with the underwater photography I'd done in Cornwall, so freshwater fish seemed like the obvious choice. Very little had been done on them when I started and I quickly found out why, they are very difficult to get close to! However, with a little patience and finding the right techniques and venues I did get some results."

## WILDLIFE PROJECTS

Focusing not just on stills, Jack's work has featured on a variety of TV programmes, as he continues to champion the popularity of freshwater fish, he said: "As well as the stills I also do some camerawork for TV, which is always great to get an inside view of how these programmes are made. I've featured on *Countryfile* three times, with my local river Fairham Brook being my favourite piece for them. *BBC Springwatch* have used various bits of my footage over the years, but in 2015 asked me to appear live with Michaela Strachan because I





started a vote to get a national fish, a bit like David Lindo did with birds, which the robin won. They showed some clips of my footage, including some grayling getting frisky, then handed me a pie chart announcing the winner which was...the brown trout! It was great to meet the team, which is huge, and chat away to the presenters.”

#### CAREER ADVICE

Wildlife photography and filmmaking is a hugely competitive field so Jack shared with us his tips and advice for those who would like to get into a similar industry, saying that having a degree helped him focus but it isn't the most important thing. He commented: “If I'm totally honest I don't think a degree means anything in a creative job, it's what you as a person can produce. I've never been asked what grade I got at university. What I do

think university helped me with is to focus my attention for three years. If I'd gone travelling like I originally wanted to, I'm doubtful that I would have stuck with being a wildlife photographer.”

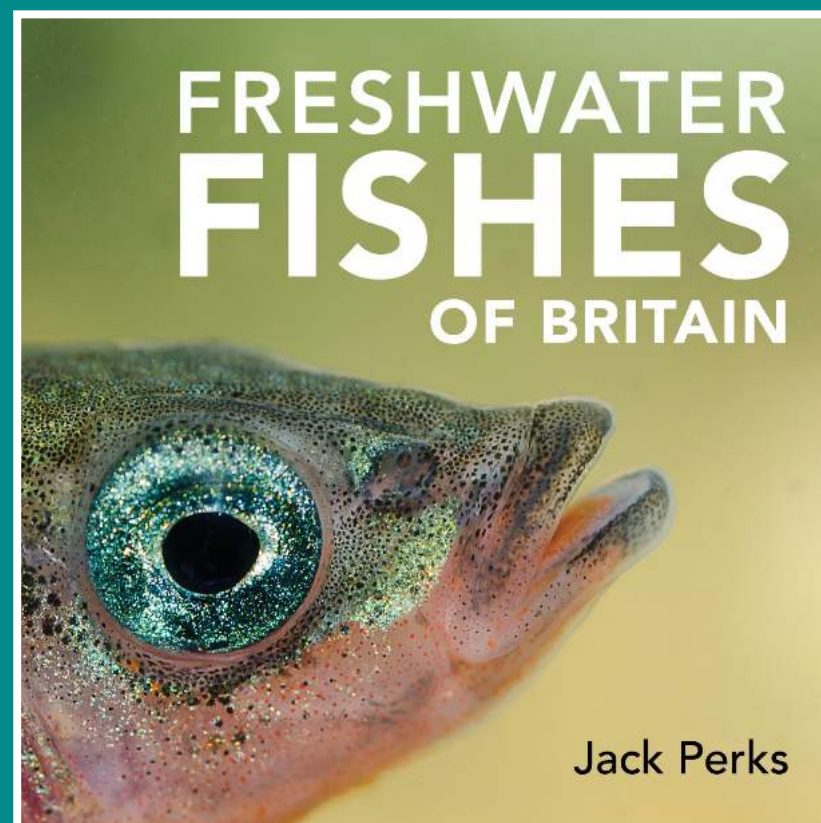
Having a specific focus, such as a particular species you photograph or a certain photographic technique, can help you stand out in this competitive industry, but it is also important for your work to be sought-after as Jack explained: “It's a very saturated market wildlife photography; there are only so many times you can see a kingfisher diving or deer rutting in a park. I think having a specialism or niche can help you stand out, but you also have to find a market for it. For example, how many slug photographers do you see? Not the most glamorous subject but a whole genre to be explored and known for. I don't make my full income off the fish stills and

footage but it certainly helps and doing other species shows I can be versatile.”

#### FUTURE PROJECTS

Work as a wildlife photographer and filmmaker can be varied, so Jack shared with us recent projects he has been working on: “I've got a field guide out next spring on pond and river wildlife with New Holland plus footage on *Winterwatch* this year. My main project is a wildlife photography TV pilot called *Wildlife Exposed*, which is being edited at the minute. I presented it and went to Shetland for three weeks filming puffins, otters and killer whales to name a few.”

To find out more about Jack's work you can check out his book *Freshwater Fishes of Britain* or visit his website [www.jackperksphotography.com](http://www.jackperksphotography.com)



A lot can happen in 25 years. By 2043, I'd love to see and hear wildlife thriving; increasing numbers of currently endangered species, ancient woodlands flourishing, soils replenished and most of all, more people knowing and loving the incredible environment we have surrounding us.

A few weeks ago the Government set out their long-term plan for the environment, aiming to improve nature for the next generation. The Prime Minister launched the plan, looking ahead to the next 25 years to create a greener country (the plan is England only). From clean air and an ocean without plastic, to sustainable land use and increased biodiversity, the plan includes a number of goals to be achieved by 2043. For me, the most important part of the plan is about increasing people's connection to nature.

Now, for readers of New Nature, it might seem strange not to regularly witness the spectacles of the natural world, but less and less people are getting outside; fewer are hearing beautiful birdsong, watching wildlife, or seeing seasonal changes. With the busyness of today's world, it is easy for us all to focus on what has to be done, losing time for the enjoyment of nature. Yet, being outside can benefit people in so many ways.

Research has shown that being outdoors improves mental and physical health, supporting our overall well-being and teaching us

things that would have helped our ancestors to survive. It can reduce stress, anxiety and depression, as well as boost immune systems, encourage physical activity and reduce the risk of chronic disease.

So how will the Government's plan help encourage and support more people to enjoy nature and all the benefits it can bring? By helping people get access to local green space, promoting environmental therapies for well-being and creating greener towns and cities. Additionally, 2019 is proposed to



be a year of green action – a year to support people of all ages and backgrounds to get closer to nature.

What a year that could be, events could happen everywhere to get people planting, learning and exploring the outdoors. I'm sure young people could lead such events, inspiring those around them to spend more time in green spaces and in turn, gain appreciation for nature. Just looking through the amazing youth environment groups around – many of which have featured in New Nature – a year full of activities could be easily

created. Imagine all the gardening tips, beach cleans and wildlife walks that could be done!

We need more people regularly getting outside to fully appreciate nature in all its glory and we need to support and cherish those that already do, to help them encourage others to join in.

Everyone should have access to natural spaces that they can enjoy. The 25 Year Plan has this ambition in its sights. The plan commits to encouraging children's connection with nature and greening our urban areas, for example by planting one million trees. While I'm sure more than one million trees could be planted by 2043, these actions are positive steps towards creating a generation of nature lovers.

I know that if I weren't able to enjoy a walk or run in my local park, I would be missing out on something pure and wonderful. I cannot imagine a future without nature all around me. That is why we need this 25 Year Plan and we need to ensure it is achieved by setting clear targets. If we aim to reach a goal, we can take steps every day to get there.

In 2043, I hope that we have not only achieved, but exceeded the commitments in this plan. Harnessing the creativity, ambition and knowledge of young people is just one way of getting to that point. I'm excited to see what the next 25 years brings for nature – are you?

Words by Emma Pereira



Words by Elliot Montieth



On the dawn of March 31st, I will be embarking on a 100-mile trek in order to raise funds for the Cameron Bepolka Trust. Below are the key pointers I hope will explain why I am doing this walk, a walk which I hope you will see my reasoning for and sponsor me.

## Who are the Cameron Bepolka Trust?

Following the tragic passing of Cameron Bepolka in 2013 aged just 16, his family set up the Cameron Bepolka Trust in his memory. Its direct focus goes towards inspiring today's youth to cherish and respect wildlife, but in particular our feathered friends the birds; as Cameron Bepolka was a much loved and admired young ornithologist on the international stage.

## What does the Cameron Bepolka Trust do?

What the Cameron Bepolka Trust do is organise and fund projects, both their own and in collaboration with other parties, to create an educational and inspiring experience for young people. By doing this, they are creating the foundations for new and improved programs and opportunities that enable young people to get actively involved in conservation. The knowledge young people gain from such projects, like those gained from BTO Bird Camp, is priceless and goes towards enriching the mind and the experiences that teenagers will undertake whilst attending one of the many events which the Trust funds and organises.

By working closely with groups such as the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Wildlife Trusts, the Cameron Bepolka Trust is not only encouraging, but also connecting young people so that they can appreciate mother nature – especially for those who may not have the means to

do so. It is becoming increasingly rare for young people to be exposed to the outdoors; the Cameron Bepolka Trust is one of the pieces in the jigsaw puzzle trying to reverse that by adding another dimension to young people's lives.

Over the years since Cameron's passing, the trust have been involved in supporting and organising a wide range of events. These events range from BTO Young Birders Camps, The Hampshire Ornithological Society Young Birders Camp, offering a Scholarship for one UK Young Birder per year to attend the Cornell Ornithology Young Birders Weekend in the USA, RSPB Phoenix Weekends and partnering up with the Homeless Children's Foundation when they sponsored 11 homeless children in Florida to attend a nature camp. None of that mentioned above would have been possible if it were not for the Cameron Bepolka Trust.

The following video was produced by young zoologist Amy Hall about the BTO's Bird Camp in 2017. A project supported by the Cameron Bepolka Trust which I'm grateful to have been a part of: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3\\_us0pL6SxY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_us0pL6SxY)

## Why am I doing this?

I am undertaking this 100-mile trek because I believe in the work that the Cameron Bepolka Trust are doing. Having gone through what they have done, I utterly and truly admire Cameron's family and friends in the light of everything, for setting up the charity with its direct and soul aim to actively engage with young people and encourage them to explore the wonders of the natural world. They're providing the next generation with the best opportunities out there, to support and develop their knowledge for both personal purposes and for those who wish to turn their love for all things wild into their future professional life.

Having been fortunate enough to attend multiple events supported by the Cameron Bepolka Trust, I can say from my heart that they make a difference in more ways than what I believe the trust originally had in mind. Not only are you gaining essential skills in conservation, scientific studying and ornithology, but they also provide opportunities for friendships to form. When I was growing up I was isolated, having Asperger's syndrome and being obsessed by the wild didn't really make me an attractive person to be friends with. However, by going to events such as BTO Bird Camp and RSPB Phoenix Weekends, myself and others attending were given the rare opportunity to socialise with similar aged and likeminded folk.

## Where will the walk be happening?

Starting from my home situated in Birkenhead on the Wirral peninsular, my trek will take me along the picturesque North Wales coast and end at the humble seaside town of Aberdaron on the Llŷn peninsular. In total, the walk is 105 miles and it may be the longest route I could have chosen out of the three most logical, but boy, will it be by far the most beautiful.

If anyone wishes to join me for a section of the walk, then feel free to get in touch and we'll come to an arrangement.

## When will the walk be taking place?

The walk will commence at 7am on March 31st, with my arrival on the beach at Aberdaron aimed to be mid-day of April 7th.

I hope that this has provided you with enough information to see why I'm doing this walk and hopefully it will have touched you enough to sponsor me, so that my generation can live in a future bountiful in wildlife.



Cameron Bepolka  
TRUST



# Wildlife Photography in Winter

Matt Livesey tells us how to make the most of the changing birdlife and landscapes this winter





Goldeneye Duck

Herring Gull

Whooper Swan

Winter is probably my favourite season as a wildlife photographer. Long gone are the hazy days of summer, with their 5:00am sunrises and blistering midday heat. As the mornings darken and the nights draw in, a photographer's day becomes all the more manageable. Sunrise can be caught by getting up at the more modest time of 7:30am. After a morning's work, there's just enough time to watch Arsenal let you down in spectacular fashion once again, before trying to forget the score by heading out at 1:30pm to make the most of the evening light. In most ways, an ideal weekend.

Of course, there's other benefits of winter photography than just me revelling in the increased license I have to stay in bed for longer. Some of the UK's most majestic species are winter visitors (no, not Michael Bubl ). Wintering wildfowl include significant

numbers of shoveler, goldeneye, wigeon, pintail and teal, with less numerous visitors including whooper swans and the bird I have long since wished to photograph the most in the UK – the smew. Winter is also a great opportunity to scan gulls with more scrutiny, with the possibility of picking out the subtly beautiful oatmeal-coloured plumage of a first winter glaucous or Iceland gull.

One way to truly do justice to the changing birdlife and landscape the UK experiences every year, is to try and capture images that convey a strong sense of this seasonality. This is a project that I have been focusing on since the beginning of autumn, through the winter and hope to pursue into spring and summer – much more than can be said of Arsenal's pitiful excuse for a title challenge.

I have found that there are a few different ways to approach this

goal, that can be divided into what I would call a 'species-led' photograph vs. a 'landscape-led' photograph. A 'species-led' photograph is what I would perhaps also call a 'birder's photograph' – it attempts to convey seasonality mostly through the species that is in the photograph. This may be, for instance, redwing or fieldfare for autumn and goldeneye or whooper swans for winter. Similarly, sedge warblers or cuckoos may suffice for spring and summer. This method is an effective way of taking close-up portrait shots of birds that can showcase their individual beauty. However, as so much of the seasonal weight rests with the bird, this style of photograph is likely to only achieve its full potential if viewed by someone who appreciates how different visiting birds to the UK can reflect the changing seasons.

Further complications arise with this 'subject-led' style as most bird migrations do not neatly conform

to the four seasons, and can at best only really be separated into 'winter' and 'summer' visitors. How then, do you capture the difference between an 'autumn' whooper swan and a 'winter' one?

This is where you would start to think about the other approach, that of a 'landscape-led' photograph. The easiest way to distinguish between autumn and winter, and spring and summer is to let some of the landscape do the talking. If you already have a typical 'seasonal' species in your frame, such as a redwing (in the UK from around October-March), then a few brown leaves or some frosty branches should probably be enough. Similarly, a few nice greens or yellows in the background of a cuckoo image should also suffice to convey a sense of spring or summer. However, if the species you're photographing is not particularly seasonal, then you will want to try and make the landscape do as

much of the talking as possible.

Herring gulls for example, are probably one of the least 'seasonal' birds you can find in the UK. Gregarious, bold and seemingly everywhere, they seem to represent a staple of everyday life in the UK (for me, incidentally conjuring up pictures of grey days and supermarket car parks). Although they are found in inland areas more frequently in the winter, it is true that I have had to work

**“Some of the UK's most majestic species are winter visitors”**

harder to make them the face of an 'autumnal' image. This herring gull photograph I believe conveys a strong sense of autumn, but relies solely on the background of red,

yellow and orange trees to achieve this sense. Similarly, the goldfinch is another bird that is resident in the UK all year around, and so this photograph depends completely on the snow in the image to achieve a wintry scene.

The ideal scenario is combining these two approaches, so that the bird and the landscape both convey the desired seasonality. Whooper swans for example are usually late autumn visitors and in this photograph, I aim to convey this not just through the swans. What couples with and enhances the idea of these birds as autumn visitors is the overhanging canopy of brown and dark orange leaves. Similarly, I have tried to create a wintry scene by waiting for a goldeneye to swim into position so I could include the snow in the background, emphasizing its nature as a winter visitor.



# Our Contributors

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



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Abby is a law graduate, currently completing a Legal Practice Course and MSc in Law and Business, with an interest in animal law and a passion for nature and conservation.

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Edward Grierson likes to write about all manner of subjects, but particularly the one closest to him – nature, whether this is on his blog or for others. He is also a volunteer with his university Conservation and Wildlife Society.

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Elliot is a birder, wildlife photographer and devoted geologist from Wirral. He is the Social Media Officer for the Wirral RSPB and hopes to raise the profile of his area.

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James is a 14-year-old aspiring ecologist and entomologist from the Sussex-Surrey border. He is interested in all aspects of nature with a particular interest in invertebrates.

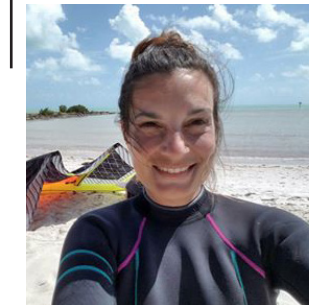
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Lucia Speroni PhD is curious about how plastics affect the health of humans and wildlife. After many years in the lab studying the harmful effects of plastics, she currently scuba dives and writes about scientific discoveries to understand the effects of plastics in the ocean.

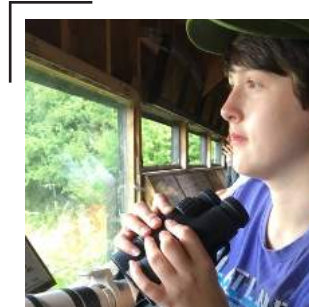
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Matt is a 20 year-old aspiring wildlife photographer from Hertfordshire, currently studying at University in Durham. He picked up a camera for the first time five years ago, after having gone birdwatching for seven years.

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Mya is a birder, wildlife photographer and trainee bird ringer from West Sussex. Passionate about protecting nature for future generations she aims to pursue a career in ornithology or wildlife photography.

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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.

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