



**FINAL VERSION**

## **Symposium on Birds, Culture and Conservation**

**School of Geography and Environment, University of Oxford  
Friday 11 December 2009**

### **Introduction**

Birds are a highly visible and valued part of modern society but people encounter them in a whole spectrum of different ways. However when it comes to conserving birds, scientific perspectives tend to dominate and may marginalise important voices, insights and revelations expressed about birds in so many other creative activities.

This symposium seeks to question that state of affairs. We intend to explore how societies, past and present, have valued birds and to explore the roles that such 'cultural birds' have for people. It brings together a wide range of scholars, poets, writers, artists, academics and conservation professionals all of whom are passionate about birds, but whose work challenges mainstream attitudes.

While the tone may be exploratory and tentative, the aim of the symposium is to create opportunities for us to discuss new ideas and perspectives. A long-term goal is to build a network of people whose collective work demonstrates that birds have always had a much broader, richer and more complex importance for human experience than that defined by science alone. This might lead us to rethink in the present day how we describe or present the importance of birds to the public – an outcome that could ultimately strengthen modern conservation practice.

The one day event will be organized into three sessions of short presentations and discussion and a final session that will seek to draw out themes and avenues for future discussion. In preparation for symposium each participant will be asked to contribute an item that exemplifies and/or prompts thought and reflection on the topic of birds, culture and conservation. These could be a reading, an image, a YouTube video, or a personal reflection and they will be posted on a symposium web-site (blog or wiki) at least two weeks before the event.

The symposium structure and speakers is outlined below. If you have suggestions for improvements please contact the symposium organizers [paul.jepson@ouce.ox.ac.uk](mailto:paul.jepson@ouce.ox.ac.uk) and [mark.cocker@virgin.net](mailto:mark.cocker@virgin.net).

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## Symposium Programme

- 9.45            **Welcome and house-keeping:** Paul Jepson
- 9.50            **Opening remarks from symposium chair:** Mark Cocker
- Session 1:      The cultural importance of birds (Session Chair John Fanshawe, BirdLife International)**
- 10.00          Another time, another place: birds in the ancient world. Jeremy Mynott, Author
- 10.20          Falcons and Culture, Helen MacDonald, Author
- 10.40          Traditional and modern haiku responses to birds, John Barlow, Poet
- 11.00          Birds and bird art, Greg Poole, Visual Artist (video presentation)
- 11.15          Responses from artists
- 11.45          **Coffee**
- Session 2:      Birds, conservation and the new media (chair Stephen Moss, BBC producer)**
- 12.00          The Bird Effect: Glimpsing the effect of birds upon the people spectrum, from birders to conservationists, and artists to musicians, Ceri Levy Film Maker
- 12.20          Experiences at the edge of birding and technology. Max Whitby, founder [www.Birdguides.com](http://www.Birdguides.com)
- 12.40          Questions to the speaker panel
- 13.00          Lunch

**Session 3: Academic frameworks for thinking about the relationship between birds, culture and conservation** (Session Chair Andy Golser, Ornithologist, University of Oxford)

14.00 Birds and emblems in history. Isabelle Charmantier, Academic

14.20 Building boundaries: bird-keeping and ornithological science, Tim Birkhead, Academic and author

14.40 Towards a common but differentiated bird conservation ethos: reflections from Indonesia, Paul Jepson, Academic

15.00. Questions to the speaker panel

15.15 **Tea**

**Session 4: Distillation and ways forward (Chair Paul Jepson)**

15.45 Reports and reflections from symposium rapporteurs

Mark Boyd, RSPB

Clem Fisher, Liverpool Museum

Rob Lambert, University of Nottingham

Dominic Couzens, Author

16.20 Questions and comments on emerging themes

16.30 Wrap-up question “What practical steps might we take to mobilise the creative potential of literary, artistic and media perspectives to reinvigorate UK bird conservation?”

16.55 **Symposium close with concluding remarks Mark Cocker**

17.00 **Drinks in the University Club**

## **Practicalities**

The School of Geography and the Environment is located in the Dyson Perrins Building on South Parks Road, OX1 3QY. It is about a 15 min walk from the Oxford train station. Parking in central Oxford is limited and expensive and delegates arriving by car are advised to use Oxford's park and ride system. The SoGE is a 5-10 minute walk from the centre of town. A small number of parking spaces are available for disabled participants.

For further details on how to reach us including links to maps please visit

<http://www.geog.ox.ac.uk/contacts/>

## **Symposium Blog**

We invite you to introduce yourself on the symposium blog ahead of the meeting. All participants have been sent an automated google blogger email inviting them to contribute to the blog. If you haven't yet received this please email [paul.jepson@geog.ox.ac.uk](mailto:paul.jepson@geog.ox.ac.uk)