

Birds, Nature & Creativity

An inspirational approach to nature and the environment

Birds, Nature and Creativity is the second in a planned series of ground-breaking symposia. The aim is to explore new perspectives in our response to birds, nature and wildlife, and to challenge certain narrowly defined but prevailing views on the environment. The meetings draw together a wide cross-section of individuals and institutions, whose private lives and professional work draw inspiration from the landscapes and wildlife in this country.

The day includes a programme of ten dynamic presentations by key figures in the realm of environmental action, science and the creative arts. Several of the speakers will reflect on the recent past and the possible future of our landscapes and their wildlife. An overarching theme is how these landscapes inspire us to be creative. The intention is to present a challenging mix of ideas that asks as many questions as it answers, about how society views and values nature.

Background: The ideas behind this series of symposia have grown out of private discussions over several years between a group of friends, all of whom are interested in the wider cultural importance of birds, landscape and nature:

Tim Birkhead, Professor of Behavioural Ecology at Sheffield

Mark Cocker, author and naturalist

John Fanshawe, Senior Strategy Adviser at BirdLife International

Paul Jepson, Course Director, MSc Nature, Society and Environmental Policy, University of Oxford

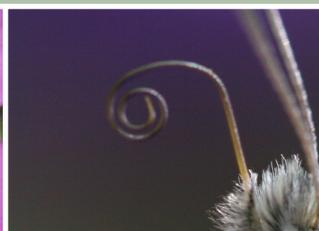
Jeremy Mynott, author and former chief executive of Cambridge University Press

A first meeting took place in Oxford on 11 December 2009 (entitled *Birds, Culture and Conservation*) and was attended by about 50 invited people, who represented a wide spectrum of individuals, professionals and institutions, all of whose work centres on or draws inspiration from the natural environment.

These gatherings have two purposes. They are first and foremost a celebration of a core cultural asset; but they also reflect our shared dissatisfaction with the low political priority placed nationally upon wildlife and nature conservation. The long-term aim is to compel a wider and deeper recognition of the centrality of our landscapes and nature in the life of this country. Too often their importance is evaluated exclusively in scientific terms, when in fact they are a resource at the very heart of much human creativity and of our cultural life. (By this we imply no criticism whatsoever of the fundamental role played by science in understanding our environment. It is the notion of scientific exclusivity that we seek to challenge). The natural world and human civilisation are counterparts in a larger organic whole, each interpenetrated by the other.

One of our long-term aims is the establishment of a regular festival that serves as a celebration of landscape and nature and a permanent reminder of what we have so long undervalued. An event of this kind would encourage the environmental community to look beyond the present narrowly defined set of ideas. It would enable us to hold politicians to account for their failures. For example, as a government and a nation we spend on nature conservation only a fraction of what private enterprise pours into the maintenance of two highly abundant, globally distributed game-birds, the red grouse and pheasant (just in order to shoot them).

Other initiatives may follow. These symposia are a first-step, a gathering of like-minded people to exchange ideas and help define our goals further. They offer the chance for a scientist to meet a poet, for conservationists to encounter the creators of music, visual arts or film, all of which draw on wild things and places for their inspiration.



Programme



Friday 19th November 2010

British Trust for Ornithology, Thetford, Norfolk

09.00: Arrival

10.00: Welcome and Introduction - Mark Cocker

Chair: Jeremy Mynott

10.10 Michael McCarthy, Env. Editor, The Independent – *The Loss of Nature and the Nature of Loss.*

10.35: John Fanshawe, BirdLife International – *J.A. Baker, the Chelmer Valley and low carbon birding.*

10.55: Rob Fuller and Andy Clements, BTO – *UK Bird Landscapes 2050*

11.15: Coffee

Chair: John Fanshawe

11.50: Carry Akroyd, artist – *Landscape Change: John Clare and me.*

12.10: Miriam Darlington, poet and author – *In Search of the Wild Otter.*

12.30: Harriet Mead, artist – *Roles for Wildlife Art in the 21st Century.*

12.50: Discussion

13.00: Lunch

14.00: Katrina Porteous, poet and author - *The Blue Lonnen.*

Chair: Paul Jepson

14.30: Creative Visions: landscape and nature and 2050.

A series of short presentations, through which younger voices share their personal vision on landscape, wildlife and culture.

1. Vicky Mason; Sarah Martin; Katherine Hawkins; Carly Vincent; Langdon Truscott; Benjy Wilcock

15.30: Tea

Chair: Tim Birkhead

16.00: Nicola Hemmings – *Saving species with science: eggs & embryos.*

16.20: Mike Toms, BTO – *The Art of Science.*

16.40: Richard Mabey, author and botanist – *Weeds: Nature as Trespasser.*

17.05: Discussion

17.45: Closing remarks and thanks. Jeremy Mynott



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