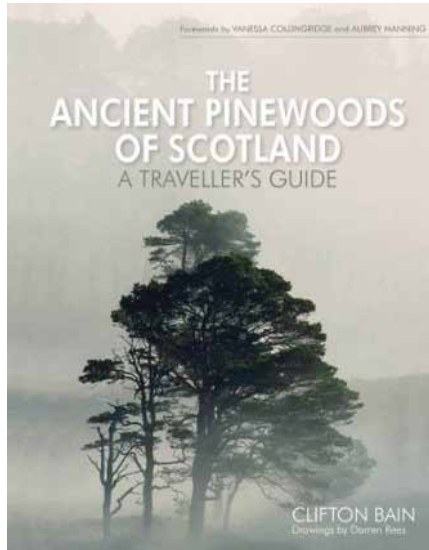


Book Reviews



THE ANCIENT PINEWOODS OF SCOTLAND A traveller's guide

Clifton Bain
Sandstone Press, 2013, 224 pages
Hbk £24.99 ISBN 978-1-908737-25-0

This is a splendid book, but I had better start with an admission of possible bias. I was a member of the camping trip the author recounts that led to the idea for this book – this was at Barisdale, the most remote and difficult to reach of the woodlands featured. Whilst we only looked on the wood from afar it stood out as a key feature in the otherwise bleak landscape – we'd just had a disturbed night of gales and rain in a leaking tent! I also accompanied Clifton on the last visit of his research. This was to a small fragment of dramatic trees growing around a steep rocky gorge

hidden behind the slopes of An Teallach – one of Scotland's most dramatic Munros.

I have always found our native pine to be a beautiful tree, and seeing some of these remnants of ancient woodlands, and knowing some of their history adds considerably to a sense of place in these remote areas.

The book works on a number of levels. It is the first fully published account of Scotland's ancient pinewoods, defined as woods that originated before 1750, since 1959. This period, my lifetime, has seen the fortune of these remnant woods wane then wax. The story of how these woods came and went and how these remnants remained is described at the start of the book. It is also, as the subtitle says, a traveller's guide, giving details of how to visit these often remote sites. Finally, it is a beautifully produced book.

The introduction reveals the author's passion for his subject, and then introduces the wildlife associated with this unique habitat and goes through a detailed history of the pinewoods. This includes subjects such as their cultural uses, the influence of the Jacobite rising and leading into the more recent history. This is where there was a slow realisation of the plight of the woods, and the developing work for their conservation. It finishes with a discussion of the influence of climate change and a look to the future.

The rest and main part of the book is a gazetteer of all the woods. It is split into 7 geographic groups, running North to South. Within each grouping the individual woods are shown on a clear map. They are then described, with their history and current state. Each individual wood

section finishes with a set of travel notes, describing the best ways to visit and where to find local accommodation and facilities, along with a translation of Gaelic place names. If you wish to follow the author's achievement of visiting all sites by public transport or on foot and bike then the travel notes are vital to trip planning.

The book is lavishly illustrated. A large number of full and half page photographs clearly show the individual woods as well as giving a feel for the woods for those who have not yet visited any of them. In addition vignettes of the wildlife by renowned artist Darren Rees are spread through the book.

The book finishes with a selected bibliography and a list of useful websites. The short bibliography is testament to the lack of previously published material on these ancient woods.

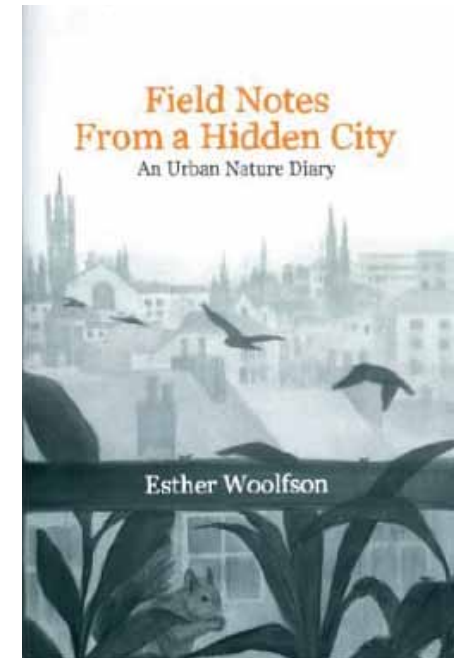
I can only recommend this book to anybody interested in trees, woodlands, wild places, Scotland or just nice books.

Mick Green

FIELD NOTES FROM A HIDDEN CITY An Urban Nature Diary

Esther Woolfson
Granta, 2013, 368 pages
Hbk £16.99 ISBN 978-1847082756

There is no doubt that Woolfson writes beautifully. Her finely observed description of the ordinary, everyday nature of her hometown of Aberdeen is like being led through the streets and spaces of the city by a friend and confidant. She invites us into her home and her family life too; the domestic insights, which themselves link to her reflections on urban nature, sitting



happily alongside her consideration of her adopted extended family, the wildlife of the Granite City.

The book's title suggests a series of vignettes, observations of city wildlife, tracking the ebb and flow of the seasons; a device that can lure the writer into cliché and unwarranted lyricism. There is also a hint quite early on that Woolfson is more animal-lover than ecologist, which raises the fear that the writing may descend into whimsy. That it doesn't is a tribute to her skill as a writer and a gradual realisation that, though her musings are understated and certainly not proselytising, Woolfson is exploring important themes about our relationship with nature and the relevance of nature in the city.

In my view this is not a nature diary and Woolfson's field notes are not the technical jottings or excited

edits of a botanist or birder; it is the journal of someone taking the time to stop and think, to examine some of the conservation issues of the day from an informed and inquiring lay perspective. Her honest-opinion over the squirrel issue in which she declares her dilemma helps lift the debate from some of the stiffness and sterility of scientific reasoning.

I wasn't expecting this book to make me think, to question, to re-examine my own conception of nature in the city. But it did. Not because it made any bold claims or set out an incisive critique of nature conservation policy, but because it reflected on urban nature from an entirely human, and non-scientific, perspective; which, sometimes, is as it should be.

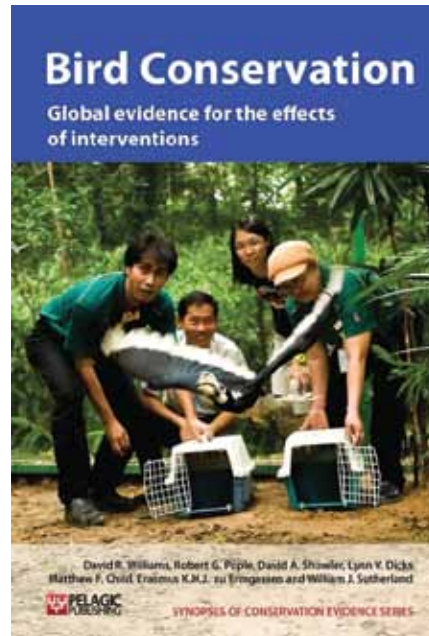
Peter Massini

BIRD CONSERVATION **Global evidence for the effect** **of interventions**

Synopsis of conservation evidence series – Volume 2

David Williams, Robert Pople, David Sowler, Lynn Dicks, Mathew Child, Erasmus zu Ermgassen and William Sutherland
Pelagic Publishing, 2013, 575 pages
Hbk £34.99 ISBN 978-1-907807-19-0
Available as a free pdf from
www.conservationevidence.com

This is not a bedtime read to understand practical bird conservation, but a detailed account of lessons from practical interventions in bird management. It is the second major output from the Conservation Evidence project which undertakes synopses of published evidence of conservation to analyse what works.



It is a very important and useful reference for anybody involved with practical conservation projects for birds. While it is not an easy read, it is a very dense reference book containing details of thousands of projects and showing what interventions have been shown to work around the world.

The volume starts with an introduction to the book, a description of how the evidence was compiled and advice on how to use the book. There then follows the evidence reviews broken down into topics. Each part starts with a useful 'key messages' section, followed by reviews of individual evidence in sub-topics. There are sections of threats – such as agriculture, resource use, invasive aliens and pollution as well as positive interventions such as habitat protection, habitat creation and re-introductions. Each section gives a brief review of the number of studies used in the synopsis and then outlines

the results of each published piece of evidence. These review either individual papers where only one exists, or goes through a series of papers on one topic, pulling out key information. All sections are fully referenced allowing readers to go to the source research projects.

The review covers an incredibly wide range of possible interventions for conservation in over 500 pages. These ranges from topics such as setting longlines at night in order to reduce bycatch, reducing predation by moving nestboxes to habitat creation and re-introductions. Each topic gives a precis of published papers, some background to the problem followed by a detailed review of papers. For example, if I wanted to consider reducing predation of curlew nests – a species I am currently working on – I might consider use of electric fences. The section on this topic informs me that one study in the UK and two in the US showed this intervention was successful for tern colonies, 5 studies in the US showed higher survival at wader and seabird colonies although one study was less positive. The section then gives me details of the studies, along with the original references.

For too long we have been doing not much more than gardening on our nature reserves, and too much conservation has been because that "is what we have always done". We have spent lots on useless projects based on hearsay. This, as the latest synopsis, is an extremely important publication. Hopefully we can start to direct conservation effort based on the evidence of what actually works, and continue to build up detailed evidence by monitoring and publishing results of new techniques. Every conservation manager should have a copy of this, and its associated

volumes. As they are available as a free download there is no excuse. Also available on the conservationevidence.com website is an open access journal of recent findings and an ever-expanding database of evidence. All conservation managers should contribute to this. Too much past conservation has been a nice fluffy exercise which has regularly failed to deliver. Given the current crisis in wildlife declines we need to sharpen our game and for this we need to use the best available evidence. This volume and its associated publications will help us to do this.

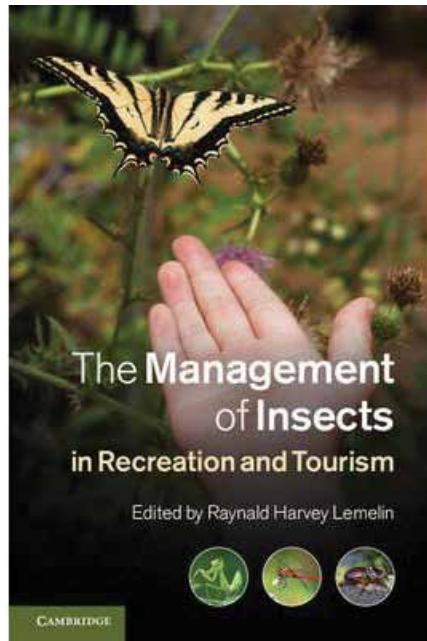
Mick Green

THE MANAGEMENT OF INSECTS IN RECREATION AND TOURISM

Raynald Harvey Lemelin (Ed)
Cambridge University Press, 2012, 365 pages
Hbk, £65.00, ISBN 9781107012882

This book uses thought provoking case studies to show how insects can be used to foster activities for engaging people with wildlife habitats, no matter the 'creepiness' factor. Although the title suggests that recreation and tourism are key themes, the book celebrates the range of ways in which people engage with insects and use the fascination that insects engender to promote conservation and science.

Stretching the meaning of insects, my favourite case study is the 'entomologically horrified tourist': large numbers of visitors to a park in Texas experienced the creepy yet enthralling effect of massed spider webs and their millions of leggy inhabitants, a natural phenomenon that many described as 'horrifying'. The chapter discusses the importance of experiences that



tap into a human desire for repulsion, fear and disgust and considers how such experiences could be used to seek escape from routine or stressful environments by providing excitement, challenge and learning.

Other chapters look at opportunities for the general public to learn about insects, for example through dragonfly parks and butterfly gardens, framing popular insects like bees as conservation ambassadors; how fishing can lead to a fascination with aquatic insects; the growth of edible insects in tourism, and the growing popularity of insect festivals.

The book's final section covers the 'conservation frontier'. These chapters cover the rise of digital technology in helping to identify insects; the role of citizen science in collecting data and increasing understanding of insects; how involving schoolchildren in entomological studies of their local area

can foster partnerships between local communities and scientists; and the development of 'microwildernesses'.

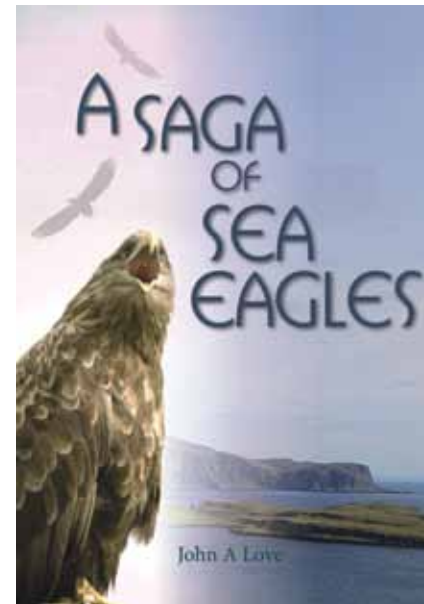
The book concludes with an analysis of the biggest challenges for human-insect interactions, especially the continuing disconnect between humans and nature manifested in the emergence of 'entomophobia', although the numerous insect projects in the book and beyond suggests that there is a huge appetite for people to appreciate insects. The editor suggests education and outreach programmes to reach those who have not had the chance to become enthused. It is noted that bio control, gardening, and insect pets are all missing from current agendas. Given the recent public debates on pesticides this is a shame, but the book as a whole is an optimistic and encouraging celebration of insects, human-insect engagement and the potential for insects to become appreciated and respected by everyone.

Emily Adams

A SAGA OF SEA EAGLES

John A. Love
Whittles Publishing, 2013, 240 pages
£19.99 pbk ISBN 978-1-84995-080-0

My gaze followed the pointing finger out to a distant cliff appearing as if from mist but in reality low cloud. I slowly grasped how this sheer slab of rock was very far away ... and huge. "That was where the last Sea Eagle bred". I had a vision of some hardy Victorian cum Edwardian gentleman dressed in tweeds, swinging over this yawning drop on a rope, intent on lifting the huge eggs from the nest somewhere below into a pouch slung over his



shoulder. War raged in Flanders but here death was a possibility also. A vision of a time of horrors; and a massive eagle finally driven beyond these western isles. When I actually saw a Sea Eagle in Scotland for the first time, decades later, I was dodging speedy tourists' vehicles on a narrow road.

A Saga of Sea Eagles is John Love's second book on his association with the successful re-introduction of this huge eagle. He writes "I had chosen a monographical approach to *The Return of the Sea Eagle* (1993) since, at that time, the species was relatively unknown". Much has changed in the story since and more rapidly than the pioneers, amongst whom Love is significant, dared hope. This work is certainly a personal narrative, but not entirely without the kind of background and detail to appeal to a broad audience of readers.

'Association' is perhaps reflective of Love's own modesty in his account to

share out the credit for the lengthy process that brought the Sea Eagle back to these 'western isles' between those who drove the idea forward and himself, charged with making it work. He forgets few names it seems and writes informatively of roles and experiences, at once admiring and yet honest, that, too frequently in other hands, slides into chummy back-slapping. Not here thankfully. His first chapter (The return of the native) is welcome to those of us who had some passing acquaintance with one or a few of those he portrays who helped to shape conservation in Scotland, especially in respect to birds, in the latter part of the 20th century.

It took a certain creative vision to imagine the re-introduction of such a species might be possible and, as nearly always in the story of Scottish ornithology in the 50s and 60s, George Waterston's (1911-80) name is front and centre. It was Waterston's friend Pat Sandeman (1913-2006) who, following a lead provided by that larger-than-life figure John Morton Boyd (1922-98), wrote to the then Nature Conservancy in July 1957 to suggest the re-introduction of the Sea Eagle be attempted; three perhaps very different men engaged on a singular mission. The site of the first re-introduction attempt is usually given as Fair Isle in 1968; Love describes a fascinating story of an earlier release at Glen Etive in 1959, made largely in secret because of fears of adverse publicity. Such secrecy as existed was rather blown away when the one adult bird, now free flying, went to pose for tourists beside the main road through the district. "Unfortunately, the adult was semi-tame ..." remarked a doleful Sandeman later. The Fair Isle attempt was better founded but that too, came to nothing; Love writes that this effort had had good prospects for success, but subsequently, a larger,

more ambitious scheme had to be tried before calling time. It was to be made on the Isle of Rum.¹

The Isle of Rum National Nature Reserve was owned and managed by the Nature Conservancy Council (now Scottish Natural Heritage), so avoided conflicts with other land owners and stock rearers, problems not to be so adroitly side-stepped subsequently.² The man driving the 'project' now was Derek Ratcliffe (1929-2005), aided by colleague Ian Newton and supported by Roy Dennis, then of the RSPB. Not everyone (as I know myself) was encouraging and some doubters inside and outside conservation had to be convinced. As Love (quoting Newton) concedes, Rum was not an ideal place to begin again: "... the climate was exceptionally wet, and the food supply relatively poor for most of the year". Another failure here would come a time when forces were gathering in their criticism of what they perceived to be 'interference' in *their* land rights by 'politically motivated' conservation. Somewhat more helpful to the project's prospects was a change in attitude towards Sea Eagles in Norway, where they were legally persecuted until 1968. It was at this point that John Love became the main player in *Saga*, sent to Rum on six week contracts!

The Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* has a sweeping distribution around the northern globe, but strong populations in only Norway and Russia, though other national re-introduction or 're-stocking' programmes are today forging ahead. The Sea Eagle is not restricted to littoral habitats by nature; lakes and forests will serve the species well.³ In Norway however, I have known it only as a bird of the coast. It is colossal close up, more a vulture than an eagle. We would know

one was coming over our camp by the 'air raid' alert provided by our resident Arctic Skuas, who would rise up nosily and intercept a bird on the move; they looked like sparrows buzzing around a flying carpet. Despite the cheerful expectation of a local sheep farmer, none dropped in beside us to grab a lamb for a photo op. Their favoured ploy was to wait on some exposed rock at low tide and, on cue, lazily flop over and relieve the local gulls of what they had found left behind by the ebb. Once unknown hereabouts, sightings became commoner over two decades. A cheerful young local birdwatcher told me last time I was beside that Arctic sea that this long coastline boasted 22 pairs.

The co-operation of the Norwegians in the re-introduction in Scotland was crucial and freely given. Love singles out ecologists Johan Wilgohs, and Harald Misund in particular, as being seminal to his work's success. An annual 'supply chain' between Bodo RNAF air base in Norway and RAF Kinloss was set in motion and fledgling Sea Eagles were flown over in multi-million pound Nimrods to be conveyed onwards to Rum and Love's well known cages, where they were allowed to grow up in sight of their new home, "so similar" to where they had been hatched. All of this is described in some detail and copiously illustrated with colour photographs; indeed, the book as a whole is superbly illustrated, many with line drawings by Mr Love. The picture research has been extensive; there is barely a blank spread in this book of 240 pages. Love does not say so in so many words, but exposure, through media coverage, has been vital in gaining public sympathy for the whole exercise.

After releasing 82 birds from Rum the project closed in 1985.⁴ That year the

first successful nest produced a chick, the first Sea Eagle to hatch out in the British Isles in 70 years. Problems in plenty exist; pesticides and the persistent and illegal use of poisoned baits on Highland estates are troubling; but the Sea Eagle is back.

A Saga of Sea Eagles is not a monograph then; certainly there are charts and some discussion employing fieldwork data and very full references, appendices and an index. It is however, much more: a very good read.

Barry Larking

References and notes

1. Rum is preferred by Love over Rhum. This one will run and rhun ...
2. A scheme mooted for eastern England ran into "vociferous" and apparently successful opposition by landowners.
3. Love discusses an old proposition that contends the Sea Eagle was more populous in Scotland than the Golden Eagle in centuries past.
4. Referred to now as 'Phase 1' to mark it out from later follow-on re-introductions elsewhere.

THE GLACIAL WHALES

Brian Day

CreateSpace, 2013, 558 pages

Pbk £11.50 ISBN 978-1481942959

This novel explores a deeply disturbing future where the world's oceans are mercilessly raided in order to feed the voracious appetites of the depraved, 'fashionable' and obscene tastes of the powerful and wealthy. Central to the story is *The Orca*, a restaurant where everything, perhaps even the very souls of the Syndicate of the Shining Star - its board of directors - has its price. There in the grandeur and pomp; the looming extinction of a species is cause for excitement as increasingly rare quarry commands exorbitant prices for such delicacies, the thought of which would



turn the stomach of the most seasoned sea farer. Infant whale is commonplace on the menu here.

As the ocean stocks decline so the rape continues with increased barbarity. There is no safe haven, no conscience, no moral code among these men who stalk nature's most magnificent of beasts. There are moments where Eubalin, the central whale character seems almost deity-like, tranquil but brooding; possessed by Poseidon himself. The curious paradox here is that Orochi, the owner of the Orca, a predator in his own environment is so tiny, diminutive and frail in comparison to the great whale's presence.

The backdrop of the novel feels as if mother nature herself is turning on man. She is wreaking revenge, actually siding with the things we hunt. The Asian city, home to the Orca is being frazzled in an immense heat wave, the city is approaching a state

of chaos in which children and the elderly are collapsing on the pest-laden streets. Computer networks are failing, water is being rationed. Rin, the manager of the Orca is mourning the death of her son from heat exhaustion. The scream of sirens, the pulsing heat are with the reader whenever the Orca, the city and Rin's story are concerned, giving a claustrophobic feel to the world Day has created.

That, compared with Eubalin's dark blue, placid world is startling, a world the crew of the Hooded crow, one of the Orca's private fleet seem hell bent on shattering. When reading as Eubalin the pace of the novel does change, the reader can almost hear the whale's massive heart beat in their ears. Whalesong, melancholy and the baritone thrum of the deep all add to the texture of the tale.

Brian Day, although passionate about his subject matter and obviously thoroughly

researched does at times suffer from a touch of long-windedness. He also in places uses slightly esoteric language. However it is completely forgivable as the theme and message perhaps do need the reader to do some research on the matters at hand. And let's face it, people need to be reminded, continuously of what it will take for change to occur. Brian gives us a sense of that; happy ending omitted or not.

Make no mistake, this is a tale of hopelessness, of fighting when there is no chance of victory, of ruining the chances we as human beings have had to turn things around. At times you may find yourself feeling uncomfortable in your own skin. I hope that whoever finds themselves on the journey Brian Day creates, finds themselves thinking "I'm going to do something about this..."

Adam Quaeck

BANC field visit and AGM 2013

**Saturday 19 October. Great Crane Project
West Sedgemoor RSPB reserve, Somerset**

We will be starting the day with a morning walk from the West Sedgemoor RSPB reserve led by Damon Bridge of the Great Crane Project. Cranes can't be guaranteed but we do promise an interesting and informative walk.

After a break for lunch, the formal part of the AGM will take place, with the election of BANC Council members, a review of last year's finances and a look ahead to the next twelve months. All members and prospective members are welcome to join us on the day. We can only take limited numbers on the morning's excursion so advance booking is essential.

For more information or to reserve a place email enquiries@banc.org.uk

If you would like to help BANC in any way we are always open to offers! You do not need to become a Council member to contribute to BANC's activities. If you are interested in helping within BANC Council, nominations are welcome before the event - contact enquiries@banc.org.uk