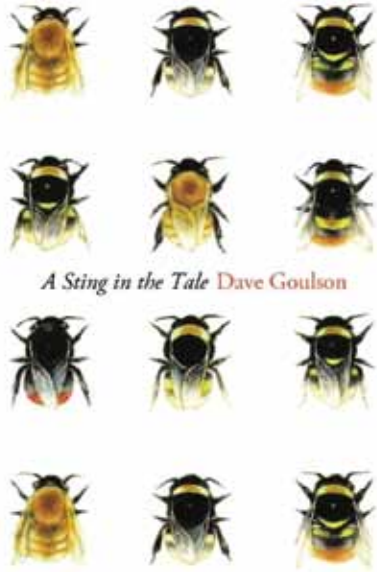


Book Reviews



A STING IN THE TALE

Dave Goulson

Jonathan Cape, 2013, 288 pages
£16.99 Hbk, ISBN 9780224096898

Dave Goulson has dedicated his career to understanding and supporting members of the diverse and frequently threatened family of bumblebees. *A Sting in the Tale* takes the reader on a journey through the world of the bumblebee, from the hibernation of queen bumblebees through winter underground, to how bees use smelly footprints to avoid wasting energy visiting flowers freshly stripped of nectar by other insects.

Goulson uses autobiographical details liberally to bring the human elements of

bumblebee research and conservation to life, introducing an array of human and non-human characters who help make bumblebees better understood.

Throughout the text, you have a sense of a deep personal dedication to bumblebees on the part of Goulson, whose interest began at an early age when he attempted to rescue chilled queens by placing them in the oven to warm up. The resulting toasted insects led to further research and more successful revival using syrup on a spoon. This anecdote leads into a brief discourse about insect metabolism and the impressive warming skills of a bumblebee nest placed in a deep freeze. Goulson contextualises his own journey of becoming a biologist and conservationist by describing major discoveries about insects and their anatomy and life history, name checking the key research groups, and dating the discoveries made. There is unfortunately no bibliography for the interested reader to follow up directly, but these clues should make it possible for the major papers to be located.

The first and last chapters of the book are about the re-introduction of the short haired bumblebee, last seen in the UK in 1988. Goulson discusses the peaks and troughs of working on a high-profile conservation project that released the first queens of the species back into the UK in 2012, only to be hit by one of the wettest summers in recent years. The importance of such flagship species for other species is emphasised by the spontaneous reappearance of several rare species to Dungeness and Romney Marshes following local efforts to replant and maintain wild flower meadows, with support from land owners who had previously not realised

that they hosted such interesting and threatened species. During the same period, Goulson also started up the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, which has done much to raise the profile of bumblebees and other insect pollinators in the media and with the public.

The book gives the reader a lively view on the reality of research, and the fact that Goulson is still engaged in conservation work gives the text life and immediacy. The author demonstrates that although much has been achieved, there is still a lot more to do. Importantly, he encourages people to get involved and make a difference.

Emily Adams

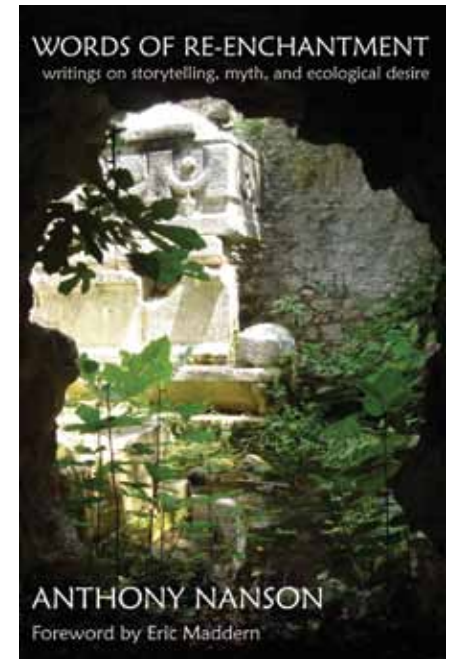
WORDS OF RE-ENCHANTMENT Storytelling, Myth and Ecological Desire

Anthony Nanson

Awen Publications, 2011, 208 pages
Pbk £9.99 ISBN 978-1906900151

The worlds of storytelling and of nature conservation do not sit as happily together as you might imagine. They tend to collide somewhere around the kids' activities at environmental events, often with North American tales of Coyote and friends, or with Grimm's rather dark offerings. But stories can have a great deal more to offer the worlds of nature conservation and land management than children's entertainment: for example as a means of exploring our deep connections with the land, at an ancestral and deeply creative level.

Anthony Nanson's collection of essays is written from the personal experience of someone who not only explores the oral storytelling tradition, but who deeply



cares about the fortunes of nature. Nanson explores the various threads between storytelling as an art, and the organic, messy and complex themes behind ecology and the natural world. The definition of 'ecology' varies in this book between scientific interconnection, sustainability of resources, and climate change disaster.

Forcing stories to specifically focus on environmental messages, rather than characters, is a difficult craft. The conclusions and morals of such stories are often crudely drawn, and in many senses they miss the point – of interconnectedness. So, we work the traditional tales we find as they are, to provoke awareness, understanding and action of people and environment, with a touch of chaos and magic thrown in for good measure. The use of stories in this way is explored through Nanson's writings, and I found these essays to be most useful.

I have to confess that for me, the analysis of the craft of storytelling does not bear too bright a light. Unpicking the fabric of magical story, and dissecting creatures of fantasy and imagination, can make for uncomfortable reading. I am unsure about the term 'eco-bardism' as proposed in this book: although the basis of 'eco-bardism' appears to be protest against neo-liberalism based as much in the arts as in the sciences, which is to be applauded, why give a sub-division of storytelling a label? Why not just let the stories speak?

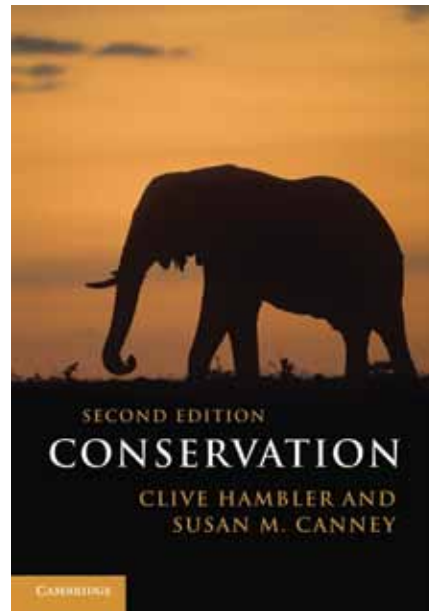
But there is some profound honesty here in Nanson's observations, the courage to explore, and some gems of inspiration. Telling the story of a species that became extinct is, sadly, as much part of our folklore as Little Red Riding Hood. Perhaps those tellers, like myself, who are striving to strengthen the environmental aspects of our stories would do well to consider more contemporary, fact-based, and genuinely scary tales of the natural world in our story-bag.

Lisa Schneidau

CONSERVATION

Clive Hambler and Susan M. Canney
Cambridge University Press, 2013
(second edition), 416 pages
£27.99 Pbk ISBN 9780521181686

Apart from its lack of references to *ECOS* material, it is hard to fault this updated text book from the Cambridge stable. The text is straightforward and crisply written, supplemented by useful lists, case studies, and tables. The book lacks opinions and resists any dogma, so throughout its pages the information is succinct and acts as a primer on all



strands of *conservation* policy, practice, and theory, as well as the social and economic context.

If there is one hint of opinion, it relates to use of the dreaded B-word, and certainly appeals to this reviewer: "One of the values of the word 'biodiversity' is that it covers genes and ecosystems as well as species, and 'diversity' has great political appeal. However, serious problems arise when people assume that diversity is always desirable for conservation. Furthermore, some damaging activities are claimed to benefit 'biodiversity', even when just a few common species gain. We prefer to use the term 'wildlife' when possible". I am heartened to see this reference to the shortcomings and sloppy use of biodiversity - a distracting word which has become so invasive in dialogue amongst wildlife and conservation practitioners.

The book is truly comprehensive in its treatment of theory and practice in

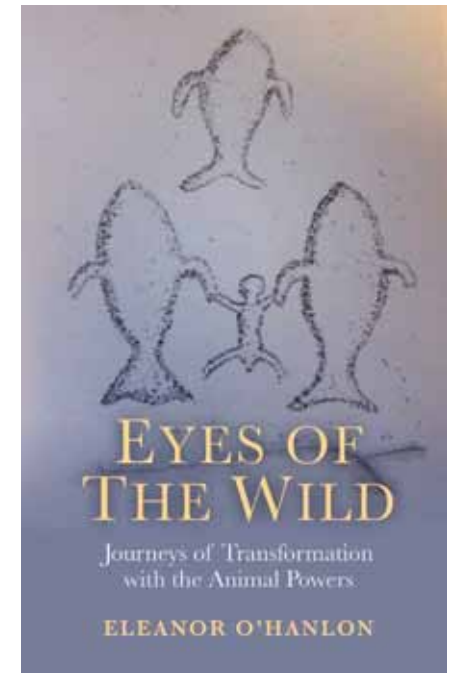
conservation. The focus is on UK practice and experience, but overseas examples are often used to offer wider perspectives. This second edition has useful components on many topical matters which influence approaches to UK conservation, including reintroductions, rewilding, restoration, offsetting, ecosystem services, economic methods, attitudes and social values. Early sections cover philosophy and ethics, extinction rates, population and human consumption effects, wider threats to wildlife, and priorities for conservation.

The practical factors required for site management and site monitoring are set out in two helpful chapters, and the section on management of species makes useful points on conservation genetics, and approaches to in situ methods and ex situ methods including seed banks, botanic gardens, zoos and private collections. A final strength of the book is the probing and questioning of the meaning of 'semi-natural'. The strong chapter on 'semi natural habitats and traditional cultural landscapes' implicitly recognises that conservation priorities are often informed by cultural judgements and by long-evolved practices in land management, as much as scientific weighting and rigour. Overall, this is a wise overview of the current world of nature conservation. It will appeal to all those who recognise the subject is truly multi-disciplinary.

Wendy Neville

EYES OF THE WILD Journeys of Transformation with the Animal Powers

Eleanor O'Hanlon
Earth Books, 2013, 266 pages
Pbk £14.99 ISBN 978-1-84694-957-9



The book's cover image comes from a petroglyph on the coastal rocks of Kodiak Island, Alaska, on the ancestral lands of the Alitak people. Ancient and indigenous cultures' perspectives on their animal neighbours and animal spirits accompany each part of the book, as the author mixes field researchers' reports, her own intense observation, and shamanic journey in her accounts of whales, wolves, bears and wild horses. Each creature has its own extended part of the overall book, as Eleanor O'Hanlon blends science and story, field biology and local tradition to immerse the reader in the rawness of life for these animals, and the raw emotions of people who study and live alongside them.

In the Book of Horse we are transported to the Ghost Forest, east of the Canadian Rockies, beside the Stoney Nakoda First Nation people's land. Here we watch the wild horses and ride amongst them with the author and her experienced guide. We

are told of riding behaviours which will calm the strong-willed stallions in view. The horses are technically feral but that should not de-value the experience of learning from these animals, at one with their home habitat. "The wild horses are our sacred places" a Stoney Nakoda member reflects to the author, explaining how he regards the authentic relationships of life. Deep in the forest the author's guide explains the bonds and relationships within the herd. We see how the horses connect to their ecosystem. They have evolved darker colours to aid concealment. They protect themselves from wolves and pumas by remaining still in the woodland shadows, as the deer do. This is an adaptation from wild horses' more instilled flight behaviour which evolved in the rangeland habitats they more commonly occupied across North America. Back to a more grim reality, the Ghost Forest itself is threatened. The demands for logging could now destroy this special place, and the freedom of these re-wilded horses.

In the *Book of Wolf*, O'Hanlon starts in the Georgian Caucasus where local

scientists have rescued and released orphaned wolf cubs, amidst the gross culling of wolves by Russian hunters. The author meets a biologist who learnt to live alongside wolves, respecting their space and behaviours, allowing himself to sleep in the open nearby but undisturbed: "After some time, they let me take deer meat for myself from their kills – once they had eaten themselves. Those wolves were my teachers. Before I lived with them, I had been trying to analyze animal behaviour even though I didn't know enough to understand what the behaviour was really about."

Through her journeys and the powerful connections with the people and animals she encounters, Eleanor O'Hanlon shows how to find an inner freedom if we meet the natural world on its own terms. *Eyes of the Wild* is a rare and wonderful book. Its treatment of nature is holistic. The author will take you deeper into wild places on many levels.

Geoffrey Wain