

ownership. Local community projects by LandLife were suggested as good models of community engagement in urban green space and wildlife management.

### Tweet on

Twitter for BANC has been an engaging experiment, and one that we will continue through the autumn and winter, so please join us at #revitalisecons to share your thoughts! And thanks to all of you who joined us already. It has been good to join passionate, interesting and enthusiastic people in discussing conservation topics, and we hope these debates will contribute to revitalising the conservation sector.

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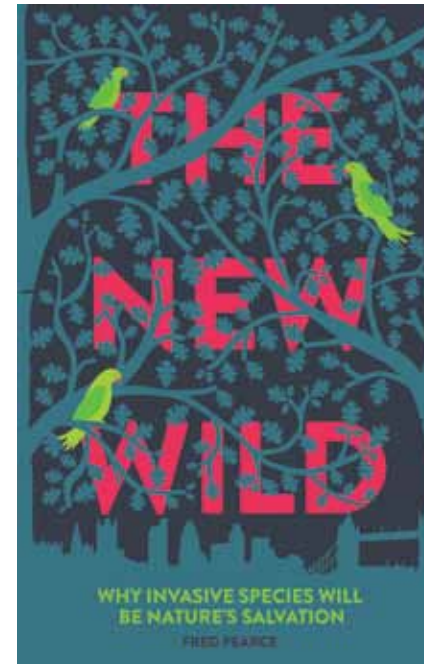
**Emily Adams** is BANC's Development officer. [emilyadams13@gmail.com](mailto:emilyadams13@gmail.com)

'Flags' produced by leaf and flower bashing onto linen triangles, by participants on the 'Wild Learning' project by Neroche Woodlanders at Young Wood - the venue for this year's BANC AGM and 'Revitalising Conservation' event. Learners come from local deprived estates and homeless shelters in Taunton. They were invited to make patterns with the leaves and flowers and write some words to describe their experience of being in the woods.

Photo: Gavin Saunders



# Book Reviews



## THE NEW WILD Why Invasive Species will be Nature's Salvation

Fred Pearce

Icon Books, 2015, 310 pages  
Hbk, £16.99, ISBN 978-1-84831-834-2

In a recent *ECOS* I reviewed Ken Thompson's *Where do Camels Belong*, a refreshing and novel attack on the long-held assumption that as far as the environment is concerned, Native equals Good, while Alien equals Bad. Then, like buses, along comes another in less than a year. *The New Wild* is an important read. Fred Pearce is one of the world's most experienced and

thoughtful science journalists, and this book contains a wealth of first-hand experience and a great deal of research.

The "New Wild" Pearce envisages is a world with new biodiverse ecosystems containing new combinations of native and alien species. It sounds like a *laissez-faire* approach akin to the more sensible ideas of rewilding - allowing nature not conservationists to decide what is 'right' for an environment. But there is a lot of rigour and good science behind this startling notion that migrating species offer hope, not calamity.

The first part of the book reviews the history of invasions and introductions across the globe, starting with the example of Green Mountain on Ascension Island, where a treeless mid Atlantic rock has developed a highly diverse and functional mountain forest composed of introduced species from across the globe. This has taken only 200 years, and is safeguarding most of the few natives, while giving the lie to notions that high biodiversity requires lengthy co-evolution.

Turning to Britain, Pearce exposes the hysteria over Japanese knotweed, and the absurd assumptions behind the generally accepted report that it costs the UK £170m per year to grapple with this plant. The overall economic damage to the UK by alien species is assessed at £1.7bn per year, but 60% of that is alien pests on alien agricultural crops - so where is the credit side of the economic argument?

The book is strongest looking at the broader picture. Many of the examples quoted by what has become the "alien species industry" turn out to be temporary surges of species within habitats wrecked by human modification

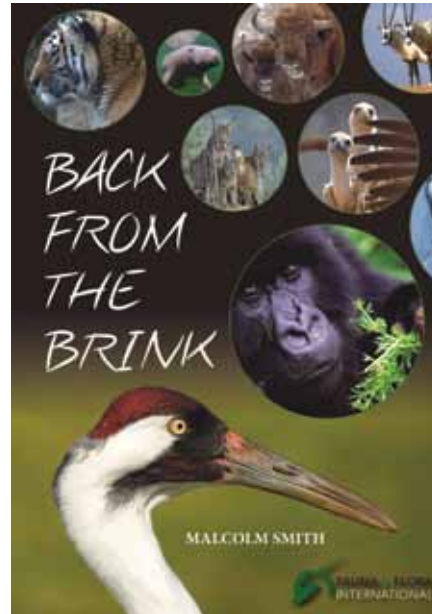
or pollution. The aliens cope in these degraded environments where the previous residents couldn't survive - and often actually help restore the habitat so in time the natives can flourish again. Furthermore, bald statements like "40% of extinctions are down to alien species" have grown like Chinese whispers from selective misquotes from very limited initial data.

Pearce assembles evidence from all continents that what we assume as "pristine or virgin" forest or savannah ecosystems are nothing of the sort. Much tropical rainforest for example has recolonised land cleared for agriculture and occupation in the last 1000 years. Wildernesses are cultural landscapes, and highly biodiverse habitats are not static, but dynamic and more resilient than we might think. Above all, there is little evidence that typical climax communities are so tightly organised from mutually adapted species that adding an alien will cause extinction of one or more natives. On the contrary, in most situations (except rats and goats on islands with vulnerable birds) adding new species just increases biodiversity. And I'm glad Pearce mentions those hotbeds of UK biodiversity, gardens and brownfields, where huge insect biodiversity flourishes in a context of 70% of plants being alien.

In a ravaged world, we cannot expect even colossal expenditure to turn altered ecosystems back to what they once were - whatever that actually means. Pearce foresees a world where aliens are accepted as part of the mix that will generate "The New Wild". Not what we had, but certainly more rich in wildlife than what we have now, and ecosystems where evolution through adaptation and hybridisation will be rapid and exciting.

The book is a dense read, un-enlivened by any figures, graphs, tables or photos, but it is full of well crafted information, and served by a decent index. The arguments may irritate you, but they will certainly make you question your assumptions.

Steve Head



### **BACK FROM THE BRINK**

#### **A Breath of fresh air**

Malcolm Smith

Whittles Publishing, 2015, 230 pages  
£18.99, Pbk, ISBN 978 1849951470

Malcolm Smith is a biologist and was chief scientist at the former Countryside Council for Wales. He has had many features on wildlife and the environment published and is the author of the acclaimed *Life with Birds, a story of mutual exploitation*.

Don't be fooled into thinking this book is biased towards successful

conservation stories. It highlights at great length the effort and dedication of people and organisations, such as Fauna & Flora International (FFI) that have helped prevent extinction of species and successfully reintroduced many of them back into their natural habitat. Many of these species are not well known and thus the book provides awareness of species that are struggling for existence and a profile. The book gives historical background and detailed accounts of the timeline of these animals on the brink of existence.

The book covers the journeys and historical backgrounds of over 15 different 'rescued' species throughout the 20th and in to the 21st century. The wild turkey of North America for example have recovered dramatically and are a genuine conservation success story. Others such as the whooping crane, the Siberian tiger and the black rhino have recovered but are still vulnerable and in desperate need of a long-term conservation effort. In addition, species such as the humpback whale have recovered entirely naturally as a result of the ban on commercial whaling and have needed no intervention in recovering their numbers. These stories demonstrate how there is a need to tailor the conservation strategy with each endangered species. The message is clear; there is no magic solution that will recover these species. Malcolm Smith explains how effort and genuine dedication over many years is the prime reason why many of these species have been rescued from near extinction.

There are certainly lessons for UK conservation. For example the story of the large blue butterfly is symbolic in the struggles to save a species on the edge of extinction. It demonstrates how

acting too late results in extinction and that after that literal 'point of no return' the species cannot be recovered. In the case of the large blue, reintroductions have been made using a different population entirely as the original native population ceased to exist. The message here is that we have time to turn these declining populations around, however if we do not act soon there will be no going back.

*Back from the Brink* demonstrates how there is still work to be done and how decades of effort will be for nothing if there is not continued work and support as well as a greater awareness of these threatened animals.

Chris Porter

### **MARINE BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION**

#### **A practical approach**

Keith Hiscock

Earthscan, 2014, 318 pages  
£34.99 Pbk, ISBN 978-0-415-72356-5  
Also available as an ebook

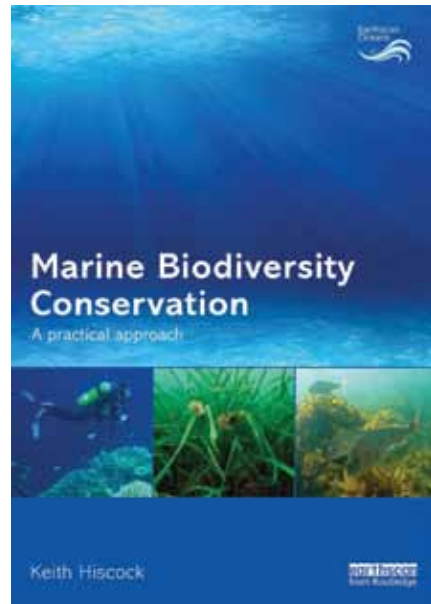
### **GOVERNING MARINE PROTECTED AREAS**

#### **Resilience through diversity**

Peter J S Jones

Earthscan, 2014, 256 pages  
£49.99 Hbk, ISBN 978-1-884407-665-5  
Also available as an ebook

These two titles in the Earthscan oceans series are hopefully an indication that marine conservation is finally catching up with its terrestrial sibling. Although neither book is restricted to northern waters they are both timely as there is a lot happening in the marine conservation world around the UK at the moment. The Marine Act protected areas finally start to be designated around England, Scotland is also dedicating new marine protected areas while Wales is still thinking about



sites but is developing governance and policy on marine issues. Also, we finally see proposals for a set of Special Areas of Conservation to protect porpoises around the UK – only 20 years late!

Marine conservation requires a different approach for a number of reasons such as the lower evidence base to start with, the lack of ‘ownership’ and easily delineated areas, less of an ability to ‘garden’ as we do on land and the difficulties of policing areas mainly out of sight. Marine conservation is much more about governing human activities than managing Nature.

The focus of *Marine Biodiversity Conservation*, the book states, “is on benthic species living on or in the seabed and immediately above, rather than on fisheries or highly mobile vertebrates”. This makes a change as books on marine management have often focused on fisheries. The author, Keith Hiscock, has a fine pedigree. After being involved with

the designation of Lundy as the UK’s first marine nature reserve he then led the marine conservation review and became Head of the Marine Nature Conservation Branch at JNCC before moving to the Marine Biological Association at Plymouth, where he is now an Associate Fellow and Senior consultant in Biodiversity and Conservation Science. Although the book is aimed at students it also claims to “provide sound guidance for... professionals”.

The first Chapter covers the need for marine biodiversity conservation and is a useful review which many politicians should read! It includes a look at the driving forces behind these needs and has a brief look at ecosystem services. The book points out that effective conservation needs to be based on sound science and the next few chapters give a grounding in that. A look at data needs and sources is followed by chapters on ecosystems, understanding change and the impacts of man’s activities on marine ecosystems. The book re-iterates that “ Ecologists and policy advisors should not rely on models from terrestrial or freshwater systems to inform marine conservation. Marine ecosystems are different...” and the structure and functioning of marine systems is described.

There follows an introduction to the application of science to marine conservation, and issues associated with rare or threatened species. The order of the chapters does not always seem logical. For example, a chapter on the selection and management of MPAs (which overlaps to some extent with our second book) is sandwiched between chapters on sampling and recording and then assessing impacts and monitoring change – both of which are important and very much linked. A look at recovery

and restoration is followed by a final rather thin chapter on ‘conclusions and the managers toolbox’.

The volume is well illustrated with relevant diagrams and a selection of colour plates, clearly labelled with the point they are illustrating, in the centre of the book. The case studies scattered through the chapters come from a variety of temperate and tropical environments and illustrated a wide range of concepts and issues.

Although the cover states that the book is a ‘practical guide’ it is not really a handbook to be readily thumbed as management plans are produced. It is an academic tome aimed at students, but it does contain a lot of clearly explained concepts and practical examples that will be useful to anybody involved in this rapidly developing area. The long reference list, with an emphasis on review papers, is a valuable source.

The author concludes that writing the book has reminded him of the “diversity, beauty and importance of marine life. At the same time, it has been depressing to see how easily some parts of marine ecosystems can be damaged by human activities”. Hopefully this book will help stimulate a new generation of marine conservationists to address the problems, develop the themes in the book and get stuck into marine conservation.

The second book on *Governing Marine Protected Areas* is also academic and theoretical in its approach. Whilst an analysis of ‘what works and why’ is needed this book does not really deliver. The book starts with questions such as: “How can we move to MPA governance systems that balance vested interests...” and promises to explore these questions and

the issues they raise from a “governance perspective”. The book also makes the points raised in the previous volume that governing marine sites is very different from the models we are used to on land. The case studies used in the book are all within territorial waters and it is made clear that sites in international waters have very different governance issues.

The first half of the book is an introduction to Marine Protected Areas, a look at the objectives of MPAs, including the IUCN categories for such sites and a look at theoretical perspectives of governance. We then get a chapter on the empirical framework used to analyse governance issues at 20 MPAs with a worldwide coverage. Finally we get to an ‘Overview of case studies’. This should have been the meat of the book but it unfortunately tells us little about the sites chosen and we are referred to an appendix of a technical report that may be available elsewhere. The main contacts used to obtain information for each site appear to be mainly academics rather than site managers or users and while the accounts tell us which model of governance is employed at different sites there is no analysis of whether the governance system has worked.

While we need to work out how to govern or manage marine sites in an inclusive way agreeable to all users this book does not really progress our thinking. A less theoretical analysis of what has worked, where it has worked and the success factors would be much more useful. Whilst this series of books raises the profile of marine conservation it would be helpful to have publications looking at practical experience of what has and hasn’t worked so that we can develop MPAs to fully contribute to conservation.

Mick Green





### H IS FOR HAWK

Helen Macdonald  
Jonathan Cape 2014, 320 pages  
£14.99 Hbk, ISBN 978-0224097000

I tend to be circumspect about literary hype, and the awarding of big prizes doesn't usually attract me to a book. So I wasn't sure about *H is for Hawk*, winner of the 2014 Samuel Johnson Prize for Non-fiction and the Costa Book of the Year award. But my mother pressed me to read it, and I owe her a debt for having done so.

In essence, *H is for Hawk* is the story of Helen Macdonald's relationship with a goshawk, Mabel, and its role in helping her to come to terms with the death of her father. Macdonald had held a fascination for hawks since childhood and had trained as a falconer, yet Mabel the goshawk is a challenge she only just manages to meet. Her struggle with the

bird serves as a metaphor, a catharsis, and a distraction from her grief.

As well as being a personal memoir and a natural history monograph, *H is for Hawk* is also a partial biography of E H White, author of a previous nature writing classic, *The Goshawk*, published in 1951. This link to Macdonald's own tale of a biographical and often psychological analysis was risky and potentially over-complicating, yet it works. As a narrative device it allows her to bring some fresh air into the intense story of her grief and her relationship with Mabel, by looking back to White's own complex relationship with the same species.

White, better known for his Arthurian novels, was a peculiarly repressed and tortured character with a brutalized childhood who played out his frustrations on his own goshawk with little understanding of the subtleties of falconry. Macdonald had read *The Goshawk* with revulsion during her childhood, unable to understand his cruelty, yet her own experience of grief brings a new empathy for him. His misanthropic and confused battle with a wild creature hides a love that cannot speak its name. "He could not imagine a human love returned. He had to displace his desires onto the landscape, that great, blank green field that cannot love you back, but cannot hurt you either."

The connection between human loss and emptiness, and human connection with the natural world, is a strong and persistent one. Nature is the friend which fills the void, companionable yet disinterested. Something you can talk to, without fear of reproach or compromise. Something which takes you out of yourself, literally, by giving you a focus

outwith the pain in your heart, yet one which is still heart felt. For that alone, Macdonald's account resounded with authenticity to me. Authentic in part because it does not make the mistake of seeing nature as always beneficent. "Like White, I wanted to cut loose from the world, and I shared, too, his desire to escape to the wild, a desire that can rip away all human softness and leave you stranded in a world of savage, courteous despair."

The particular feature of falconry which lends itself so well to the nature writing genre is the nearness, and yet the distance, between human and bird. There's a tension, an attracting and repulsing magnetism. You get physically close to a creature which is tethered to you. Yet there is a burning wildness about this creature, which tolerates its relationship with you only as a strategy for obtaining red meat.

Mabel is tamed, and yet clearly anything but tamed. Part of the fascination, for the reader and for Macdonald herself, is the reptilian coldness about her, flecked with hints of warm character. She appears "like a griffin from the pages of an illuminated bestiary", yet once comfortable with her human companion, likes to play with screwed up balls of paper. The beholding of that cold wildness though, and the proximal and instrumental role of the falconer in the life of the hawk, betrays a darker, yet hugely important part of the thrill, which Macdonald acknowledges in herself and in White: "By skilfully training a hunting animal, by closely associating with it, by identifying with it, you might be allowed to experience all your vital, sincere desires, even your most bloodthirsty ones, in total innocence. You could be true to yourself."

Helen Macdonald has said that by combining different genres into one, she was trying to let them speak to one another. She succeeds, viscerally, and in doing so she helps the nature writing genre take another step forward in maturity and depth. Though sometimes it's a hard read, shockingly open, it is ultimately a hopeful tale, and the result is much greater than the sum of the parts.

Gavin Saunders

### RAINBOW DUST Three centuries of delight in British butterflies

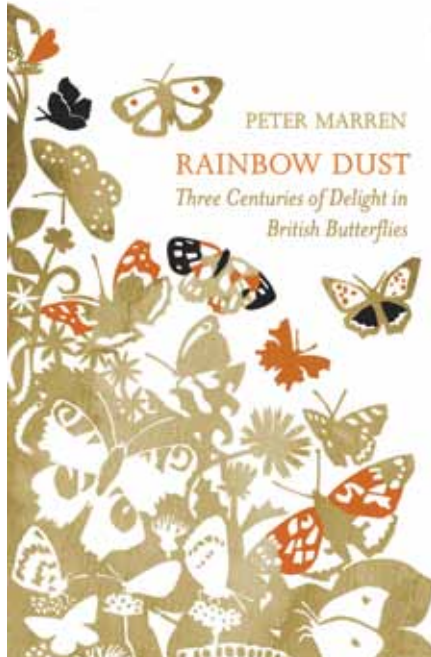
PETER MARREN  
Square Peg, London, 2015, 208 pages,  
Hbk, £14.99 ISBN 978-0-22409865-6

### IN PURSUIT OF BUTTERFLIES A Fifty year affair

MATTHEW OATES  
Bloomsbury, London, 2015, 480 pages  
Hbk, £18.99 978-1-4729-2450-6

Occasionally, I muse on a question that occurred to me some years ago: Is there such a thing as an ugly butterfly? So far, I'm inclined to think not. The question was prominent when I read *The Aurelian legacy*<sup>1</sup>, a well illustrated coffee table tome in which Peter Marren had a hand. That book, and the new one by Marren, more engagingly written, but a little meanly illustrated, provide plenty of evidence for my inclination. And the chronicle of Matthew Oates's lengthy affair is solid evidence that the attractiveness of butterflies can be besotting well beyond the powers of most other living beings.

I was interested to note that in each author's childhood a copy of *The Observer's Book of Butterflies* had a catalytic role. *Rainbow*

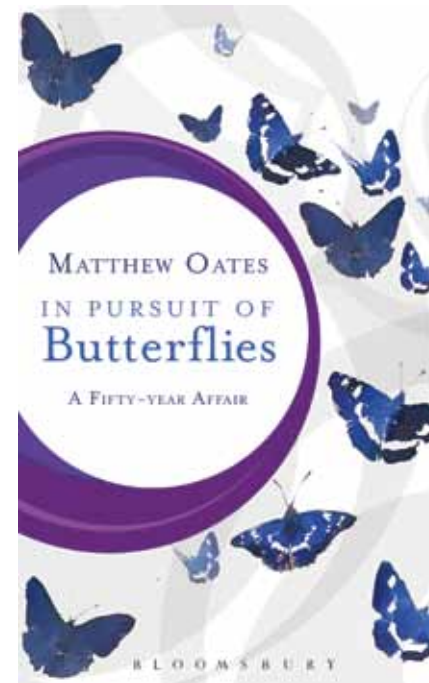


*dust* makes a journey quite well signposted by references and notes, as Peter directs us through a history of awareness of and then enthusiasm for butterflies, the collecting and naming of them, their uses in arts, in writing and as symbols, the societies in which these insects were admired, discussed, and exchanged, and books about them. For the naturalist, this is full of interesting detail. Peter ends with a summary of Britain's butterfly losses and declines, and his thought on the survivors' preservation. Matthew's journey is personal, and he has little to say about this history, though there are well-suited hints of it. Peter Marren's intention is to look at butterflies in order to see their effect on "our thoughts and ideas" – that is, their "cultural impact". The Oates chronicle is a microcosm of such impact and how it manifests in the intensely butterfly-centred worldview of one person.

The two new books are quite different. *Rainbow Dust* begins with the writer as a child becoming intrigued by these insects, and ends with an appendix summarising each British species; but the bulk of it is the saga of English people and organisations involved in their natural history, soundly based in contemporary writings, with Peter's comments on the story and its characters. *The Pursuit* is conducted by Matthew, beginning in his childhood, from 1971 based on extracts from "the diary". The parade he describes, perhaps not unexpectedly, is predominantly of grander, more flamboyant, rarer, or obscurer, species. Such ordinaries as the cabbage whites and commoner browns are mostly just extras. It is essentially a history of his butterflying expeditions in Britain, most in southern English counties, and of the more significant species seen, with mostly short comments on other aspects of natural history, and a lot of details of the weather.

Matthew's style at times annoyed me, with frequent molesworthian humour, much minor hyperbole, and fascination with patrolling males picking off virgin females and the occasional "pairing *Homo sapiens*" he happened upon. Often, the book seemed overly focussed on repeated eulogies for butterflies. I wanted a stronger context, and more thoroughly discussed aspects of and implications for butterfly conservation than occasional and often unsubstantiated comments. Also, I hoped the book would have discussion of butterfly conservation with respect to other aspects of conservation and post-conservation. If it has, it is largely hidden.

Besottedness seems to afflict not a few butterfly devotees. Matthew reaches his poetic apogee when he finds a rare form



of the purple emperor (so he thinks). More prosaically, two of them took the trouble to write a book enumerating the 'aberrations' of the chalkhill blue (all 400 of them!); others count brown hairstreak eggs on blackthorn, even by car headlights and in snowfalls. Or maybe it is something other than besottedness. In one massive collection a pile of boxes all held the scarce silver-washed fritillary ab. valezine, and Matthew wonders "just how many *valezina* a man actually needs"....

To the Early Greeks, butterflies represented the visible part of the human soul. Indeed, their word *psyche* meant the human soul and also butterfly. When we think 'butterfly', we draw up positive and pleasurable images: this is a symbol of beauty, joy, faerie, and freedom of thought. Matthew Oates tells us that what he most eagerly seeks is natural

beauty, and that butterflies make the best offer of this. There is, though, a downside, for these also serve, in some parts of the world, as symbols of such things as sickness, frailty, and death. Their images are not entirely positive, too, when from a male perspective they symbolise feminine delicacy, of fragility, and of sensuality. Neither *Rainbow dust* nor the *Pursuit* follows these threads.

The positive has the stronger pull. Over the past few decades, butterflies have become relatively popular. He doesn't say how many he found, but I guess Peter's list of butterfly images he found in a supermarket was impressive. Butterfly Conservation's membership is not on a par with the RSPB's, but is more than any other specialist wildlife charity's. A success story? But in the last two short chapters – too short, and too separate for my liking – Matthew tells of a change of understanding he has had. Nature "had been his mentor and had latterly become his cathedral". Nature conservation, as he now sees, is love: a mending of the relationship between ourselves and Nature. Somewhat hijacked by ecology, nature conservation urgently need story-tellers and poets.

Peter Marren's thoughts on conservation are somewhat more integrated, but, again, could have been carefully built on. For instance, "conservation thrives on figleaves" seems to deserve, and need, more than four lines explaining that, while listing butterfly (or other) species to give them legal protection, we zap their habitats without let. "It is hard", he says, "to make an economic case for butterflies. We do not need them; nor [...] do they need us. But we care about them all the same, because that is the way we are." Matthew, I think, would partly agree. There would still seem to



be scope for investigation into just *why* these insects are so attractive.

Peter's book should be read top-to-bottom. Matthew's can be too, if you have time and concentration, but a dip-in approach will also serve to demonstrate a nice display of the pleasure that one manifestation of natural beauty can give. I still don't know of an ugly butterfly; but they're not the only beautiful things around.

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*Martin Spray*

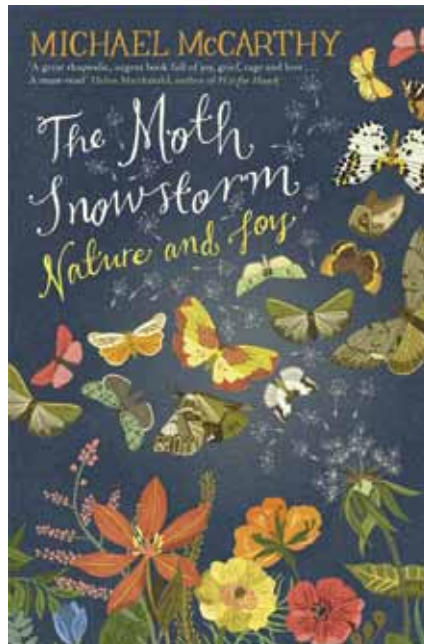
### THE MOTH SNOWSTORM Nature and Joy Review

Michael McCarthy

John Murray, 2015, 272 pages  
Hbk, £20 ISBN 9781444792775

You should not judge a book by the cover but as is often the case in nature, there is always an exception and this is one of those. I could sit for a long time just looking at the lovely representations of moths and flowers by Dawn Cooper that flow across the cover. Fortunately, the track-record of the author, Michael McCarthy, ensures that within the book there is something worth reading.

This is an intriguing book in some ways. To me, it is not a call to arms but rather a lament for what has been lost by a member of that lucky generation, the baby boomers, who were able to experience the British countryside in a way denied to those of us who came after. It could also be said to be an apology on behalf of that generation. The author begins by making the case that the sustainable development



approach to protecting the environment has failed and the 'new' ecosystem approach has yet to make its mark. On both counts, he is entirely correct and so, he proposes a third way. This is to protect the environment because of the joy that it brings us: to protect it because it warms the heart and feels a part of us. So maybe it is really an ecosystem service? Perhaps many readers will not need to be told about the enjoyment we can feel when experiencing the natural world, but with increasing development, materialism and disconnect from the countryside, we may be in the minority. There is a growing body of scientific evidence of the importance of engagement with the natural world upon our recovery from surgery and upon our mental health and general well-being. This perhaps offers the strongest case for revising how society views and treats nature.

In the process of developing his viewpoint, the author takes us across the

world and back with a broad range of examples (jaw-dropping, in the case of Saemangeum in South Korea) that will ensure most readers will find something that they can relate to. I was delighted to discover a kindred spirit that counted down the days in autumn until the shortest day was reached, and who took joy in harebells and running a moth trap. Inevitably, there is discussion of wildlife losses in Britain and equally inevitably perhaps, is reference to *Silent Spring* being the trigger for greater awareness of the harm done by agricultural intensification. In truth, many were concerned sometime before then. Few today, for example, will be aware that the former Nature Conservancy established its eco-toxicology unit under Norman Moore two years before the publication of *Silent Spring*.

The author is very honest about his family circumstances and how this led to his

interest in wildlife. This made me wonder how many naturalists found their calling as a result of unhappiness or loneliness at home? Is this another as yet unquantified example of the healing or protecting powers of the natural environment?

This is a book that assumes no prior knowledge of the subject area and will appeal to those with a general interest in the environment as well as the battle-scarred campaigner. The text flows well and is both interesting and informative. Will it influence the politicians to stop seeing the environment as an obstacle to development rather than an integral part of our existence? Fat chance, sadly. On the other hand, I can see this being a book that influences the writers of tomorrow and that may be an important legacy.

*Alistair Crowle*

**Wildlife Travelpass:** Natural England has looked into landscape bridges and wildlife overpasses – structures which can help connectivity for birds, mammals and insects despite a road or railway blocking their path. The report *Green Bridges – a literature review* by consultants LUC is available from NE's web site. It reviews 56 examples, including pioneering examples in Holland and the Mile End green bridge in east London. The photo here shows a side view of Scotney bridge in Kent's High Weald AONB. Hopefully Highways England and other UK transport planning bodies will get the message.

Photo: © Natural England/Liz Bingham

