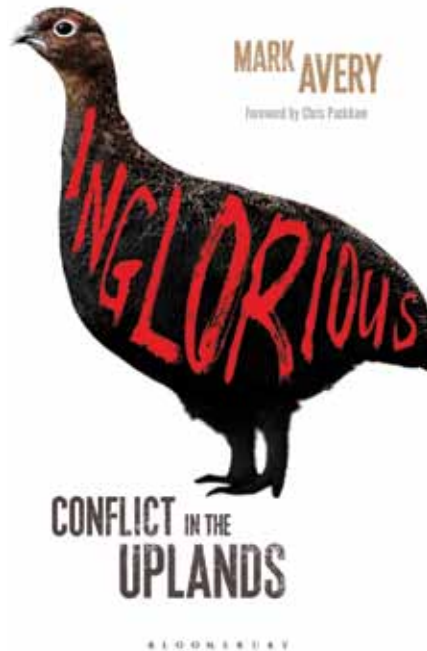


# Book Reviews



## INGLORIOUS Conflict in the Uplands

Mark Avery  
Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015, 304 pages  
£16.99 Hbk ISBN 978-1-4729-1741-6

In May 2015 *BBC Wildlife Magazine* listed naturalist and broadcaster Chris Packham as the second most influential figure in its 'Wildlife Power List' of 'Britain's Top 50 Conservation Heroes'. In September in the same magazine, Packham accused Britain's major conservation charities of a "shameful" silence on the issues of fox hunting, the badger cull and the illegal persecution

of raptors. The charities, he states, are guilty of selectivity over which species they chose to protect, being "hamstrung by outdated liaisons with the 'nasty brigade' and the risk of upsetting old friends" in the rural shooting and landowning communities. In response, Tim Bonner, Chief Executive of the Countryside Alliance, which lobbies to promote certain rural interests and traditions, said this was just the latest example of Packham using the position granted to him by a public service broadcaster to pursue an "obsessive crusade" of unbalanced 'animal rights' propaganda. The BBC, therefore, should consider removing Packham from its future programming. The magazine, produced under licence from the BBC by Immediate Media and obliged to follow BBC editorial guidelines, defended Packham strongly. For editor Matt Swaine: "The column was highlighting criminal activity. It was not controversial. He was saying that we all need to do more on the illegal killing of wildlife and that no one should be standing by when criminal acts [are taking place]. Packham was doing something of real value". An online petition calling on the BBC not to sack Packham attracted over 80,000 supporters within its first month. Packham issued a video message to thank his supporters. He urged them to support the e-petition to UK Government and Parliament to ban driven grouse shooting led by Mark Avery, former Conservation Director of the RSPB, and to read *Inglorious*, Avery's book. *Inglorious* explains the context, political history and scientific bases for this position, as presented by Avery. The petition reads:

"Grouse shooting for 'sport' depends on intensive habitat management which damages protected wildlife sites,

increases water pollution, increases flood risk, increases greenhouse gas emissions and too often leads to the illegal killing of protected wildlife such as Hen Harriers". In October Avery's petition, launched in July alongside the publication of *Inglorious*, attracted its first 20,000 signatures.

*Inglorious* is essential reading for those engaged by these issues and events, and particularly by the current ecological state of the UK uplands and the persistence of seemingly systematic wildlife crime in pursuit of economic interests. The book has many strengths - scholarship, readability, wit and candor - and one major flaw, its focus on the 'single-issue' politics of driven grouse shooting. The author adopts this focus to drive home his call to ban a long-standing 'country pursuit'; one which has friends, participants and stakeholders in high places of a different kind. In challenging powerful interests one must marshal all one's evidence and *Inglorious* is a well-researched and avowedly campaigning text. The book offers a depth and breadth of insight on its topic that its author is probably uniquely positioned to present.

Nonetheless, in setting out his stall on driven grouse shooting Avery is left with little space in this book to explore what form of upland ecology might replace the 'grouse moors'. His main approach is to endorse the National Trust's 50-year vision for its High Peak land holdings in the Peak District National Park; a vision which implies, although does not specify, a future without intensive management for red grouse. Broader visions are important, as his 'shooting interest' opponents point to the 'conservation values' of their own work, such as the support

of much loved ground-nesting wader populations (curlew, lapwing, golden plover etc.) through gamekeepers' active (legal) control of predators. They also often own the land and control its management; although, as Avery explains, agricultural subsidies, financed by general taxation, help to support the entrenched 'grouse economy'. George Monbiot's account, in his book *Feral*, of "sheep wrecked hills" and the "green desert" of upland Wales (where there is little grouse shooting and many more hen harriers!) seems an obvious reading companion to *Inglorious*.<sup>1</sup> Assuming driven grouse shooting does soon pass into history, alongside other dubious Victorian pastimes, such as sending children up chimneys, the uplands will still require management by someone, in pursuit of some vision (optimistically perhaps, some synthesis of that outlined by Avery and Monbiot).

In his penultimate Chapter, Avery presents an amusing, if (strangely) regionally prejudiced, account of 'Terry', a former Peak District gamekeeper turned wildlife warden, looking back from the year 2046 on three decades of changing upland management. Herein lies the central problematic for Avery's campaign. Much of the uplands that are not intensively managed for grouse shooting are currently (over-) grazed by sheep, or drained for conifer plantation. With or without tweed-jacketed interventions to enhance the annual red grouse crop, they are typically wildlife-poor. A ban on grouse shooting alone will not fill the hills with birdsong, enhance ecological services and encourage tourism. The National Trust has a vision for its corner of the Peak District. What about the UK's many other silent square miles?

First and foremost, Avery offers a strong argument and convincing conclusions. Convincing enough, perhaps, for this book and its associated campaign to nudge further conservation charities, government agencies, and landowners (including utility companies) into action. This conflict in the uplands has moved far from its origins in opposing views on the morality of 'blood sports' and the provenance of game meat. The next logical step would be for government to support change by replacing agricultural subsidies for a system of payments for 'ecological services' in the uplands. This might prompt the more progressive and publically/client-accountable land managers to adopt broader-based, sustainable and equitable visions for their work in the hills. At the same time, one can imagine the prestige appeal of the 'sport' for participants beginning to wane, with a change toward more informed (less tolerant) public attitudes in the countryside as well as the towns.

Mark Avery's book is an essential contribution to what was an evolving debate on the future of the uplands and is now, for good reason, an outright battle of wills between the supporters of progress and the defenders of 'tradition'.

1. As indeed, is James Rebanks' valiant defence of upland sheep farming in his book, *A Shepherd's Life*.

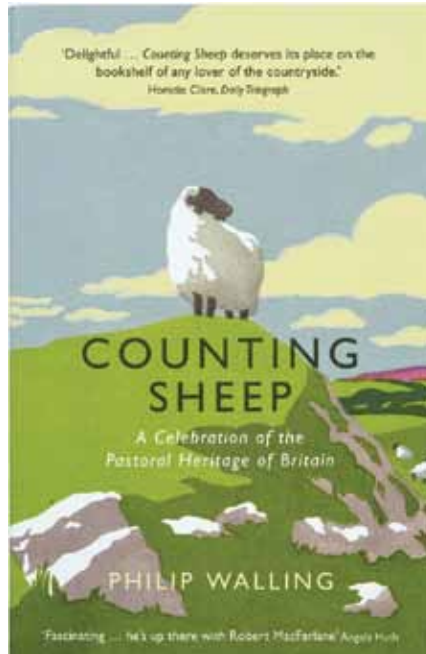
Phil Hadfield

### COUNTING SHEEP A celebration of the pastoral heritage of Britain

Philip Walling

Profile Books, London, 2014 & 2015  
Pbk, £8.99 ISBN 978-1846685057

Finding this book in my local Waterstones wasn't easy; it had



mistakenly been shelved under 'Nature' rather than 'History'. The plaudits on the cover are pleasantly effusive. Horatio Clare in the *Daily Telegraph* describes it as "Delightful" and deserving a "place on the bookshelf of any lover of the countryside" while Angela Huth describes the book as "Fascinating" and then goes as far to say "he's up there with Robert MacFarlane." Praise indeed! On taking the book to the sales counter I can't resist a joke: "I've been having trouble getting to sleep on a night..." I tell the bored-looking sales assistant. She looks up from her mobile and I add "...perhaps this might help?" I hand the book over to be scanned. She raises a quizzical eyebrow and permits herself a laugh when she reads the title.

On the train after a busy day I start to read and the title doesn't disappoint. Like Ronseal it "does exactly what it says on the tin". Here I find a detailed

and seemingly well researched and authoritative history of the origins and evolution of the 60 odd sheep breeds found in Britain. This is spread across several chapters covering ancient Viking and Celtic breeds, Longwool breeds (which the Romans brought with them) and then a long list covering sheep breeds you are more likely to encounter on today's hills and pastures including such favourites as the Swaledale and Herdwick. I was disappointed that the delightfully named Lonk doesn't make an appearance<sup>1</sup> but I trudged on through all the way to chapter 12 on sheep dogs. The central argument of the author is that Britain has always been sheep country and in the book he tells the "story of how we and our versatile, compliant companions made our landscape in the great endeavour of taming the wilderness. For man and his sheep stand in partnership outside wild nature, on the side of the civilised world, transforming its vegetation for human benefit". While he labours this point, Walling makes much of the so called Sheep Pyramid, "our unique national system of cross-breeding which uses the innate genetic potential of hill sheep to extend their productive lives and produce more lamb for the national larder".

The penultimate chapter heats things up a little in analysing the combined effects of foot and mouth and the rise in demand for Halal meat on the British sheep industry with its associated concerns over animal welfare. In the concluding chapter Walling bleats on about a variety of perceived enemies of sheep farming: from environmentalism and EU regulations through to government interference and dependence on subsidies, and on to the global markets and the buying power of the supermarket giants. Rewilding is the target of particular venom, but unlike

the rest of the book is largely born out of a fear of the unknown, prejudice and ignorance, and tends towards scaremongering and sensationalism.

Nowhere does Walling acknowledge the widespread ecological simplification of our ecosystems that has resulted from many years of intensive sheep grazing, nor does he recognise the long list of many other ills such as soil compaction, increased runoff and resulting soil erosion and downstream flood risks. Nowhere is there an acknowledgement of the cultural impacts of the "woolly maggot" such as the Highland Clearances, and nowhere is there an acceptance that with the farm subsidies that keep most upland hill farms viable comes responsibility to provide more than just sheep and a living to those that farm them.

In the final analysis, this book represents a good dose of agricultural fundamentalism. It fails to accept that, despite their importance in shaping our historical landscape and economy, the times they are a changing and things are going to look very different for sheep in the future.

1. For Philip's information a Lonk is a strong boned and well woolled hardy mountain breed originating in the Yorkshire and Lancashire Pennines.

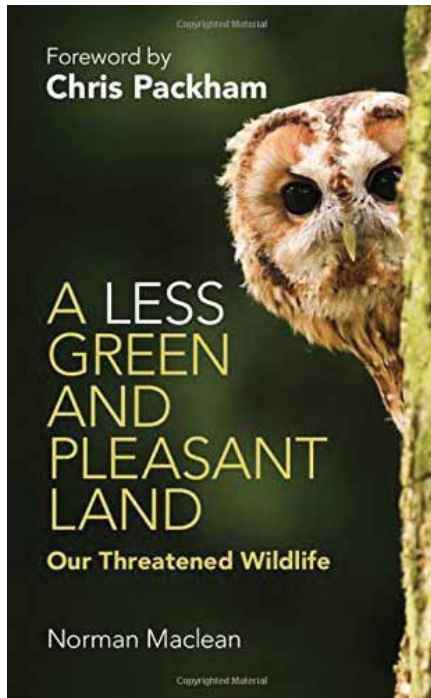
Steve Carver

### A LESS GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND: Our Threatened Wildlife

Norman Maclean

Cambridge University Press, 2015,  
409 pages Pbk, £16.99  
ISBN 9781107673236

This book reviews modern day nature conservation's successes and failures. It is a sort of 'life, the universe and



everything' ramble through what we know of the natural world in Britain and Ireland, including its current state and what we are doing about it. The publishers describe it as 'a Domesday book' of the countryside. It is obviously a labour of love on the author's part, but alas it is also a labour to read. There are many diversions, repetitions (although there is an apology for these in the Introduction) and irrelevancies: frequently I found myself thinking 'why am I reading about this?' before the book got back on track.

This maybe because it is linked to another book which I have not seen: *Silent Summer*, described in the Introduction to this one as 'an in-depth audit of wildlife in Britain and Ireland over the last 50 years'. This work 'aims to carry the same message but to present the information more

concisely and in a more accessible format'. Even so it runs to more than 400 pages.

To start with there is a brief look at the evolution of life, followed by consideration of the agents of change, such as agriculture, climate, introduced species and human population growth. Then there is a look at current conservation activity and the relationship between field sports and wildlife. The second part, labelled 'So how is our wildlife faring?', catalogues the status of the main groups of wildlife, such as mammals, birds and plants. The last two chapters are first a brief, subjective and superfluous list of what the author considers to be top wildlife sites in Britain and Ireland, and second a stab at what the future holds.

There are a lot of short sections on big subjects as varied as species extinctions and world food prices. I doubt these will add much to the general knowledge of what I guess will be a well-informed readership.

The style is curious, perhaps best described as chatty academic. For example the author says that he 'believes there are over 200 species of syrphids' in this country. A few minutes research reveals that there are about 270 species, belief does not have to come into it. This sort of thing, with generalisations and subjective assertions, is mixed with hard science including long tables and reporting of research. Inconsistencies abound as in '... we probably do have too many badgers'. I have never known what 'too many' means. This comes after mentioning that badgers eat hedgehogs, but ignores the fact that hedgehogs raid nests, something for which the book castigates other species.

In the same vein the writing displays the usual, and very conventional, inconsistencies towards introduced species. So, some are 'welcome' such as Snake's-head Fritillary, but it is 'sad' that grey squirrels cannot be eradicated. As for Spanish bluebells, apparently their main crime is that they are 'less elegant' than native bluebells. And if bluebell hybridisation is bad, why is orchid hybridisation good?

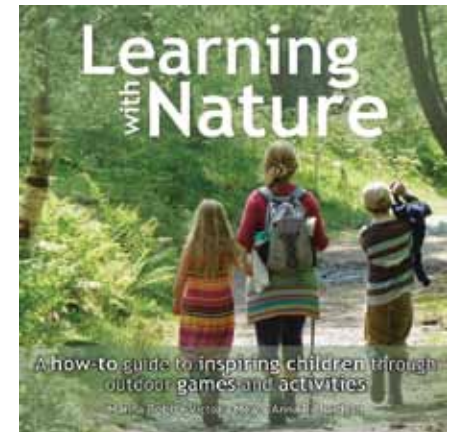
The most twisted logic of all comes in relation to cormorants. Apparently the spread inland of the mainly Dutch subspecies *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* is undesirable, not for nature conservation but for trout fisheries. Maclean says that if it could be accorded specific rank "... we might well dub the incomers as undesirable invasive species although they have come here of their own accord". The implication is that we could then eliminate them with a clear conscience. My mind is still boggling at this, but I hope it is a tongue-in cheek comment.

The editing, indexing and referencing are very poor. The Wildlife Trusts for instance, one of the main players in this drama, who are mentioned briefly enough compared to other NGOs, are not indexed. As for editing, within three pages these two statements are made: "Basking shark are increasing in Scottish waters" and "in Scottish waters these large fish are in decline by over 50%".

Many of the reference are to Wikipedia entries. This is laziness on someone's part: all Wikipedia entries have to have, and include, a background source and reference, and it is those that should be listed. In summary, if you want another doom and gloom volume with the message that 'wildlife is a countryside issue, and exotic species should not be here except

the ones we like' then put this on your shelf. If you want innovative thinking, crisp logic and sharp insights, look elsewhere.

Peter Shirley



**LEARNING WITH NATURE**  
**A how-to guide to inspiring children through outdoor games and activities**

Marina Robb, Victoria Mew & Anna Richardson  
 2015, Green Books, 208 pages  
 Pbk £17.99, ISBN 978-0-85784-239-8

As noted in the book's introduction, a typical British primary-school-age child's 'roaming radius' has all but vanished: from 6 miles in the 1920s, down to 1 mile in the 1950s, then to 700 yards in 2007. Our children are close to being obligate domestics.

The three authors' first task is to show us how to entice youngsters outside - sans virtual reality. This is not easy, when many of the parents are also indoors people. I'm not sure that they make an argument for going outside that will convince sceptical youngsters, and that will lead to them being enthusiasts for things 'natural'. However,

*Learning with Nature* is a cornucopia of ideas tested on children and adults, in families, schools, and social groups. And the activities are set in the real world. The book's main sections are Games, Naturalist activities, Seasonal activities, and Survival skills. These aren't clear-edged categories, but serve both to structure the book and to foster serendipity in it.

It is good to see such 'survival' skills as fire-lighting, the making of shelters, and finding sources of water, in a book concerned with young children. However, some naturalists might point out that such things as making bird feeders from pine-cones and jewellery from discs of wood aren't activities usually associated with natural history. This, though, is a minor point: it is three or four other things that worry me.

First: on most pages, 'nature' consists of plants or trees, and birds or 'animals' - essentially mammals, but, for instance, sometimes including 'bugs'. This is an old-fashioned classification, and does not seem a good foundation for natural history, or indeed any other understanding of life. Second: non-living things and processes of nature are sparsely scattered through the book, but mostly on later pages, where we find fire, shelter and water. Their importance and interest come over as very much secondary.

My third concern is more complex. The underlying principle of the authors' attitude to nature is, it seems, that we are its caretakers; that is, we have responsibility to see that it is cared for. The 'Looking after nature' page that follows the introduction, I found difficult.

Certainly, "human interaction with natural resources often involves manipulation of nature for our benefit". And in that we

are no different from pigeons, mice, and the Ebola virus. Certainly, many of our contemporaries "exploit natural resources in unsustainable ways", but can you think of many major cultures that didn't? Modern humanity's "hunter-gatherer ancestors", it is stated, "understood the interplay between nature and people". As a statement of fact, this is not wholly convincing, and anyway, this sort of language is a little askew if one believes that humankind is indivisibly part of nature: not apart from it, and certainly not aloof from it as a special creation.

In the words of environmental psychologist Roger Hart, an influential writer in the 80s and 90s, "paramount among the conceptual issues" is the implied assumption, so often made, that children are "closer to nature", more natural than adults. Maybe, yet there appears to be little evidence of this.

Now, I know the book is focused on the encouragement of young children to go out and have 'contact with nature', to appreciate nature and begin to (objectively) understand it, and want to share its wonder with others. And I know that a strongly 'scientific' view of the world is inappropriate, indeed counterproductive, for youngsters - and many adults. But a repeated invocation of the supernatural, as something existing alongside the natural, and alongside scientific understanding, needs careful handling.

Have fun with Flower Fairies, and Gnomes, and (of course) Tree Spirits, by all means. However, I'm with Gary Snyder, thinking that people with myths of the super-natural "do not take them literally, [though] they hold the stories very dear". There is more sentimentality than cultural myth about Flower Fairies.

*Learning with Nature's* activities generally look worthwhile, and are not simply ends in themselves. For example, 'Elder pencils' leads to invisible learning about a fire's need for oxygen, charcoal making, and the uses of different trees. Let's look at a couple of examples.

A game to "create a connection to a specific species in seconds" is 'Nature names'. Animals' and or plants' names are put in a bowl, and the children take one each. Each child finds out "something about that name", such as where and how long it lives, and if it is edible, to share with the group. Each is asked to draw their species. For variety, animals' movements and sounds can be explored. And the children can make their own lists. Besides providing a direct way to engage with and remember aspects of the environment, "before you know it you know a lot more about your surroundings and [its] species".

A seasonal activity (some years!) is making 'Snow shelters'. With a spade and e.g. ice-cream tubs for forming snow bricks, following a detailed 'how to' should result in a sort of igloo. Alternatively, hollow out a large pile of snow. This introduces the idea of shelters and something of their structure, and is a good example of collaborative working.

Roger Hart, I suspect, would have looked for more opportunities for a child to show initiative, to experiment (and often fail), and to follow unanticipated lines of investigation. And to have more say in what happened ... In *Children's participation. The theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development and environmental care* (London, Earthscan for UNICEF, 1997), for a readership different from *Learning with Nature's*, he examines worldwide

cases of action where young children are (relatively) freer to initiate, run, conclude, and perhaps evaluate, projects. "Regrettably", he relates, " ... children will either carry out [their] projects secretly or will be intimidated from even beginning them because they fear that adults will not understand their desire or capacity to carry them out."

This is deliberate, purposeful, action. The activities in *Learning with Nature* are also purposeful - the purpose being an adult's. A different sort of activity, thought to be a necessary component for a fully developed person, is *play*: activity with no obvious fixed aim except absorption and pleasure. And out of this much may grow....

It is important to remember that children play, and used to play 'in nature', outdoors. To some extent they still do, but probably not nearly enough. We inhibit their explorations, creativity, and self-testing. Real play needs no instruction manual.

*Martin Spray*

*Learning with Nature* is discounted to £12.59 with free delivery in the UK, visit [www.greenbooks.co.uk/learning-with-nature](http://www.greenbooks.co.uk/learning-with-nature) and enter our special voucher code ECOS16 in the cart. Offer valid to 31st March 2016.