

## New Naturalist No.105 - Wye Valley by George Peterken

Space will not allow me to do justice to this fine addition to the series by one of our very greatest field ecologists. George Peterken has lived in the Wye Valley since his retirement from what was then the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) in 1992.

He was for two decades the NCC's woodland ecologist and no one has done more to reconcile the very different viewpoints of forestry and woodland preservation than George. He is a natural diplomat, a scientist of rare vision and breadth, and a bloody good writer rolled into one. This book shows off George's style at its best: crisp, dryly humorous, a master of revealing detail, and sometimes surprisingly lyrical too, notably in his tour of the River Wye that opens this book. He takes a broad view in every sense. His valley is not just the step, wooded riverside we think of as the Wye but a patchwork of meadows, small farms, cliffs of limestone and other rocks, and even moors in its upper reaches. He touches on art and landscape (the Wye is the birthplace of landscape appreciation and the picturesque style of art), history and architecture, Gilpin and Wordsworth, salmon fishing and

meadow management, floods and tidal waves, and every kind of wildlife from deer to liverworts and mushrooms. No one else could have done it half so well. This is a classic New Naturalist. Read it and the presence of a truly special place will sink into your consciousness: you will, I hope, be making dates in the diary.

The book is well-printed on the whole with an excellent balance of images and text, and the fine gallery of colour images were taken mostly by the author himself. The jacket is a splendid design let down by the printing. I have seen the original artwork and it has a depth of colour and sparkle lacking here. I'm sure George Peterken won't mind if I pass on his own comment. In a mood of philosophical resignation, he remembered that the man who opened people's eyes to the beauties of the Wye Valley, William Gilpin, first saw it through a curtain of rain. Just so. Imagine the valley through a thin drizzle with the river mists starting to clear, and this jacket will surely grow on you as it has on me.

*Peter Marren*

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 NN88 **Loch Lomondside** 1st mint £85. NN92 **Lakeland** 1st mint £100.  
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### Wanted

**The Folklore of Birds, Insect Migration and Wild Flowers of Chalk and Limestone.** Must be 1st editions unmarked and in clean original d/ws. Contact Alan on 07971 606580.

Editor: Tim Bernhard  
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# The New Naturalist Collectors Club

Newsletter N° 42

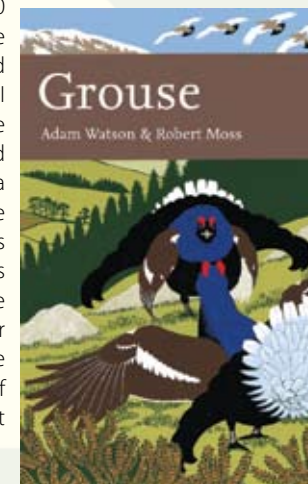
Patrons: Peter Marren & Robert Gillmor

Summer 2008

Dear Member,

**Dragonflies eventually arrived, apparently after some delays on their way to the UK, but it was worth the wait. It is a superb book, well illustrated and with a fine jacket design by Robert Gillmor. The series seems to be going from strength to strength and each of the recent volumes have been splendid additions to the series.**

This year has seen considerable interest in the NN series, with Collins launching their official website, the release of another leather-bound volume and the publication of a set of facsimile editions of the first ten titles in the series by The Folio Society. The only slight concern that I have is that there is a danger that the series will become a little too commercial. Certainly several members have recently parted with their treasured sets of NNs, becoming disillusioned with the increased values (as seen on e-Bay) and the increased number of titles per year. Collins inform me that from now on they hope to release four NNs each year, and it is likely that the price for the hard-backs will also increase. There are however, some excellent titles to look forward to. Grouse by Adam Watson and Robert Moss is expected to be published on 1st September, with an increased print run of 6500 hard backs. After that there will be Southern England by Peter Friend published on 3rd November. I understand that this will be on the geology and scenery of lowland England and will be the first of a series of similar regional books. There are also some very exciting books scheduled for next year. This includes Islands by Sam Berry which will be his 4th New Naturalist and is due for publication on 2nd February. There is also the long-awaited Wildfowl of Britain and Ireland by David Cabot and due for publication on 5th May.



I have had several enquires regarding the Folio Society facsimile editions. These are available through the Collins website ([www.newnaturalists.com](http://www.newnaturalists.com)) and from The Folio Society ([www.foliosociety.com/newnaturalists](http://www.foliosociety.com/newnaturalists)). This is a one-off reissue of the first ten volumes in the series and there are no plans to produce any more from the series. The books are available individually or as a boxed set. When I first saw these books I was very impressed at the quality of production. The books are very well bound in the usual green buckram and it is a delight to see these classic books in perfect new condition. The original plates are all reproduced in colour and there is very little difference between the original first edition and these rather smart facsimiles. My main criticism is with the dust wrappers. It is clear that fairly average original wrappers have been scanned and slightly 'photoshopped' to tidy them up and increase the contrast on the white areas, but the spines still look a little grubby and where as titles such as Butterflies and Wild Flowers are acceptable, others

such as British Game and especially Mushrooms and Toadstools look particularly browned. The only other criticism is the price. At £75 each they are a little too expensive and personally I would rather spend that amount on an original first edition, if you can find one...Having said all this, the ten books in their lovely green slip case do look rather splendid. I particularly liked the NN logo printed in gold on the ends of the box. This is part of the history of the NN series and with the boxed set limited to only 1000 examples, I am sure they will become equally scarce and collectable.



Karen Dobbs from the Folio Society has very kindly allowed all members of the club to purchase the complete set of facsimile editions for £480 (plus P&P), which is 40% off, a price normally reserved for members of the Folio Society. You can order the set by calling the Folio Society customer service line on 020 7400 4200. (When ordering, please quote The New Naturalist Collectors Club).

The leather-bound books have also caused a stir in the world of NN collectors. There have been all kinds of rumours flying around and I have watched with interest the debate on the forum of the Collins website. When the ballot was advertised, the closing date was firmly set as 16th June. This was going to be a limited edition of 400 copies, signed by Stephen Brooks. However, it seems that in the end, only 303 applications were received by Collins and I understand that copies will only be bound up for confirmed orders, so that the leather-bound version of Dragonflies may be a limited edition of less than 300 copies... Myles Archibald also tells me that he intends to publish a leather-bound version of the next NN on Grouse, and that this will be an edition of only 200. Once again the club will hopefully be able to send out application forms to all members and I hope this time that there will be a little more warning from HarperCollins.

Club member David Kings recently sent in a summary of the leather-bound copies of Number 100: Woodlands by Oliver Rackham, sold on e-Bay. This edition was strictly limited to 100 copies with book-plates signed by the author.

Number in series	Date Sold	Price
No 31	26 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2006	£2,000.00
No 23	15 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2006	£1,391.00
No 47	16 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2006	£1,562.00
No 61	13 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2007	£1,750.00
No 28	15 <sup>th</sup> Mar 2007	£1,510.00
No 5	16 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2007	£2,401.99
Average price to date		£1,769.18

Interestingly, number 96 failed to sell on e-Bay on 1st June 2008 with a reserve price of £1,500.00. This possibly reflects the recent drop on the price of New Naturalist books in recent months due to a lack of confidence in the economy.

There have been several auctions and sales catalogues recently featuring the New Naturalist series. A sale by Keys Auctioneers on behalf of The British Trust for Ornithology created a good deal of interest and a rather splendid catalogue was printed. Prices were variable but there were also some surprises with Ladybirds going for £1200 and British Larks, Pipits and Wagtails going for £1050. Sotheran's of Piccadilly have also produced a fine new catalogue with a complete run of the NN series available. The catalogue itself is bound to become a collector's item with nearly all of the covers illustrated in colour.

Congratulations go to Fred Rumsey who is the competition winner from newsletter No 41. Fred successfully identified the eight dust wrapper designs and wins a signed copy of Wye Valley by George Peterken. I had a number of grumbles from members informing me that I had made the competition fiendishly difficult. So this issue's competition should be somewhat easier, please see page 3 for further details.

All members who have a standing order should now have received their copies of Dragonflies. If any member would like to order the next title Grouse, please let me know as soon as possible. As usual members receive a 20% discount on all titles as they are published.

*Enjoy the rest of the summer and happy collecting.*

*Tim Bernhard*

## Future plans

Club member, John Beal, has discovered on a natural history bookseller's website a remarkably lengthy list of future titles planned for the NN series.

It extends the publication programme to 2019, which seems to me to be a very speculative forecast, knowing how delays almost inevitably arise to thwart even publishers' relatively short-term schedules. You will see that new titles are proposed fairly regularly throughout 2008, '09, '10 and '11 but then there is a gap to 2019. It will be interesting to see how these plans mature over the coming years. The list also includes ISBNs and retail prices! Nevertheless it provides a very pleasing and varied range of topics to look forward to and is a reassuring indication of the vitality of the series.

- The Grouse Species of Britain and Ireland (107), ADAM WATSON AND ROBERT MOSS, due September 2008
- Southern England (108), PETER FRIEND, due November 2008
- Islands (109), R. J. BERRY, due 2009
- Wildfowl of Britain and Ireland (110), DAVID CABOT, due 2009
- Vegetation of Britain and Europe (111), MICHAEL PROCTOR, due 2010
- Grasshoppers and Crickets (112), TED BENTON, due 2010
- Plant Galls (113), MARGARET REDFERN, due 2010
- Ponds, Pools and Puddles (114), JEREMY BIGGS, due 2011
- Slugs and Snails (115), ROBERT CAMERON, due 2011
- Whales and Dolphins (116), PETER EVANS, due 2011
- Dartmoor (117), IAN MERCER, due 2011
- Bacteria (118), JOHN PAUL, due 2011
- Nature Publishing in Britain (119), DAVID ALLEN, due 2019
- Marches (120), ANDREW ALLOTT, due 2019
- Nature in Towns and Cities (121), DAVID GOODE, due 2019
- British Climate and Weather (122), JOHN KINGTON, due 2019
- Seaweeds (123), SUSAN SCOTT AND CHRISTINE MAGGS, due 2019

## So you've completed your New Nat collection: what next?

**I bought my first 'New Naturalist' in a little bookshop in Southport on May 1st 1969 for ten shillings.**

I know this because (sadly) I wrote my name and the date neatly on the front free end paper. It was John Buxton's exquisite monograph on 'The Redstart' (NNM 2), a favourite bird I had studied at length during undergraduate days in mid-Wales and later in wooded parts of Lancashire. I loved that book, and truly believed I would write another monograph myself on 'The Grey Wagtail' once I had the time. Alas, I never did complete it, but I became a loyal admirer of the 'New Naturalists' from that time onwards, and, over the next 36 years, slowly added to the collection until, in the summer of 2005 at the Rutland Water 'Birdfair', I added the very last one to the book-case ~ another monograph, strangely enough, this time 'The Trout' (NNM 21), published just two years before I made that first purchase in Southport. Having reached my first objective and found copies of all titles in the main series and the monographs, I quickly decided that I would next try to find all six editions of 'The New Naturalist Journal' in order to ensure absolute completion. Apart from the familiar compilation of Journals No. 1 - 4 in book form, this proved a harder task than anticipated, but eventually Nos. 5 and 6 were found ~ and very entertaining they are too! Just try David Lack's 'An Ornithological Examination Paper' in Journal No. 6!

Now, in the spring of 2008, nearly forty years after that May Day in Southport, the collection stands at 130 books ~ 105 in the main series ( plus No.6a, 2nd edition of No. 82, and two versions of No. 100), and 22 monographs. Plus the Journals. That's an average purchase rate of just under three and a half books a year. And it didn't break the bank...well, apart from that special No.100! And, putting aside the impenetrable few, I have read most of them ~ indeed, many of my favourites have been read so many times I almost know them by heart.

As I replaced 'Ladybirds' (No. 81) in the book-case after referring to it to identify a small yellow and black example which I found in the garden shed, it occurred to me just how much we ~ the 'New Nats' and I ~ have been through together. Through all the ups and downs of family life, births, deaths, marriages, several changes of job, house moves and so on, the series has been one of the few constant factors ~ a relationship stretching over more than two thirds of my life. But relationships need to keep on the move to sustain interest and enthusiasm: so what could I do next? Of course I'll go on buying the new titles as they come out, and I'll support any new initiatives such as this Club and the new website. But what else?

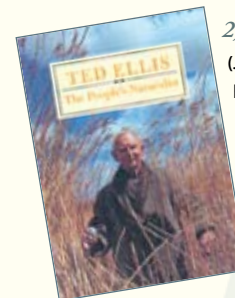
Peter Marren's book (No.82) provided the answer. Many of the 'New Naturalist' authors' life-stories prove that they were ~ and in many cases still are ~ quite remarkable men and women, who have made significant contributions to many areas of human endeavour. I decided I wanted to learn as much about them as I could, by tracking down their published biographies and autobiographies, by reading their other books on different themes, and by searching for any other 'spin-offs' I could find, thus creating a sort of 'companion' set of books, which would further support and illuminate the 'New Naturalist' world.

What follows here is a brief resumé of progress so far. As with all the books, I insist on at least 'very good' copies in similar wrappers (where appropriate), as the accompanying scans show.



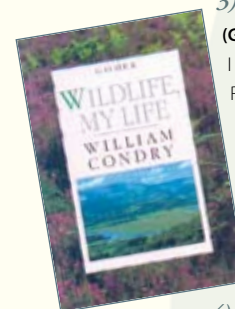
1) *Madam Dragonfly, The Life and Times of Cynthia Longfield*, by Jane Hayter-Hames (Pentland Press, 1991)

A lovely evocation of this most eminent New Naturalist's work and travels over five continents. An essential companion to NN41 (and of course the equally well-known 'Wayside and Woodland' book). Cynthia Longfield died in 1991 at the age of 95.



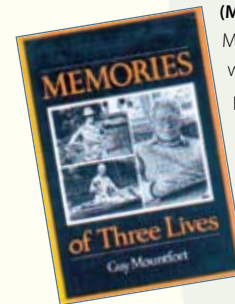
2) *Ted Ellis, The People's Naturalist*, by Eugene Stone (Jarrod, 1988)

For those lucky enough to have met Ted at his reedy wilderness on Wheatfen Broad, or to have watched his regular broadcasts on the BBC's 'Look East', this book will bring back happy memories, and add even more to the enjoyment of another reading of 'The Broads' (NN 46). Ted Ellis died in 1986 in his late 70's.



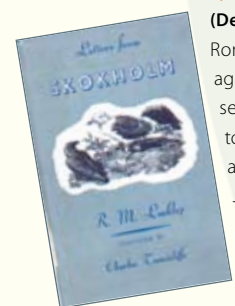
3) *Wildlife, My Life*, by William Condry (Gomer, 1995)

I was once lucky enough to be shown around the Ynys-hir RSPB Nature Reserve by this most caring and careful observer of wildlife, author of 'The Snowdonia National Park' (NN 47) and 'The Natural History of Wales' (NN 66). Peter Marren's assessment of this autobiography is absolutely right: 'A gentle celebration of a lifelong love of nature'. William Condry died aged 80 in 1998.



4) *Memories of Three Lives*, by Guy Mountfort (Merlin Books, 1991)

My copy of 'The Hawfinch' (NNM 15) is inscribed 'To Donald, with Birthday Greetings, Guy'. I like to think (although there is no proof) that 'Guy' is indeed Guy Mountfort. His autobiography describes his life as business man, soldier, explorer, conservationist, author and broadcaster, as well as family man. I have always admired the intensity that has to go into each one of the Monographs, and 'The Hawfinch' is a prime example. Guy Mountfort died aged 98 in 2003.



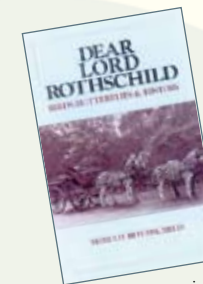
5) *Letters from Skokholm*, by R.M. Lockley (Dent, 1947)

Ronald Lockley, another nonagenarian who died in 2000 at the age of 96, was a prolific writer on rabbits, seabirds, islands and seals, but as a change from biography and autobiography I chose to add 'Letters from Skokholm' to this companion set, because all the letters were addressed to his brother-in-law, the naturalist John Buxton, author of 'The Redstart' (NNM 2), which was the first 'New Naturalist' I bought. Lockley himself was co-author with James Fisher of 'Sea-Birds' (NN 28), which was for many years one of the most elusive books in the series.



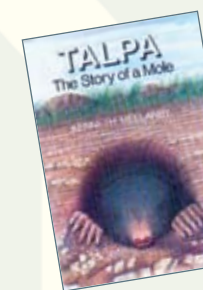
6) *Seal Woman*, by Ronald Lockley (Rex Collings, 1974)

Lockley used his Christian name for this foray into fiction. It is a fantasy, telling how the narrator fell in love with Shian, the seal girl, and how together they went with the seals to the kingdom beyond the horizon. I discovered it while on holiday in Achiltibuie, Ross-shire, where legends are still current about mermaids and seal-caves. I do not know of many 'New Naturalist' authors who tried their hand at fiction, but this one is very compelling. It also deserves its place in this collection because the illustrations in the text and on the dust-jacket are by Robert Gillmor.



7) *Dear Lord Rothschild, Birds, Butterflies and History*, by Miriam Rothschild (Hutchinson, 1983)

Another near-centenarian was Dame Miriam Rothschild, co-author with Theresa Clay of 'Fleas, Flukes and Cuckoos' (NNM 7, 1952). She died in January 2005, aged 96. Her home at Ashton Wold, near Oundle, is just a few minutes away as I write this. She lost her father when she was 15, and was influenced thereafter by her uncle, Walter, 2nd Lord Rothschild, who is the subject of this book. He formed the largest collection of natural history specimens ever assembled by one man, but is probably better known for driving around in his carriage, pulled by a team of three zebra and one 'normal' horse (as featured on the jacket of this book). Dame Miriam tells his story with wit and a light touch and her agreeable style makes this an engaging read.



8) *Talpa, The Story of a Mole*, by Kenneth Mellanby (Collins 1976)

To end this selection, a delightful children's story by Kenneth Mellanby (1908 - 93), author of three volumes in the 'New Naturalist' series ~ 'Pesticides and Pollution' (NN50, 1967), 'The Mole' (NNM 22, 1971), and 'Farming and Wildlife' (NN 67, 1981). 'Talpa' (which is of course the Latin name for the mole) is the story of the first year of a mole's life. It is simply and clearly written, with good illustrations, and reproduces for children the findings which the author set out for adults in the monograph. It is unemotional and factual, as the final few lines show: 'We do not know what exactly will happen to Talpa.... (He) will probably be killed by a Tawny Owl, and then eaten by her babies. In the wild, animals have to eat to survive. Talpa will have eaten hundreds of worms and thousands of insects during his lifetime, and it is only natural that before he gets too old and feeble, he too will be eaten by the young owls who also live in the wood at the edge of the fen'.

There are many, many more 'New Naturalist spin-offs' waiting to be discovered. John Morton Boyd's 'The Song of the Sandpiper' sounds interesting, as does Ernest Neal's 'The Badger Man'. I'm sure they'll turn up one day...in the meantime I think I'll look out my partly written MS of that 'Grey Wagtail' monograph, just in case, after 37 years, Collins decide that the time is right to add to the 22 'New Naturalist' special volumes...

*Ken Davies*

## Competition

After the success of the spring newsletter competition, we thought we would run a similar puzzle. All you have to do is identify the four illustrations bellow, each being a small section of a different New Naturalist dust jacket design. The prize will be a brand new copy of Mosses and Liverworts signed by author Ron Porley.

To enter the competition, just send in a list of the four titles from which these sections are taken and the corresponding letter of each illustration. Entries can be sent by post or e-mail and the winning entry will be pulled out of the hat. Closing date for entries will be 30th September 2008 and the winner will be announced in the Winter newsletter.

