

something readable yet authoritative, which will appeal to the general reader as well as the expert scientist?

Fortunately Cabot has overcome these obstacles to produce a worthy addition to this great series. He has achieved this partly by deciding what to leave out: "I have tried to avoid... traditional descriptions of plumage, moult, voice, field characteristics, habitats, displays and breeding behaviour", all of which is widely available elsewhere.

Instead he takes a wide-ranging approach to the subject: not just the scientific, but also the historical and cultural aspects of our long relationship with these captivating birds.

So he touches on the mythology of geese and swans, our gastronomic exploitation of wildfowl, and their early appearance in cave-paintings,

as well as providing a concise review of the current state of wildfowl conservation. And just over half the book is given over to a detailed and rigorous account of all 56 species of ducks, geese and swans which have occurred in a wild or feral state in Britain and Ireland.

Overall, then, there is plenty here for the general reader to enjoy and learn from, with just the right balance between scholarship and anecdote. A fine book on an endlessly fascinating group of birds.

Stephen Moss
TV producer, birder and author

Originally published in BBC Wildlife Magazine, August 2009.

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The New Naturalist Collectors Club

Newsletter N° 45

Patrons: Peter Marren & Robert Gillmor

Autumn 2009

It has been an exceptionally busy summer and much of my time has been spent preparing for the Club's first symposium at Nature in Art on 12th October. The winter newsletter will be a special edition dedicated to this event. Collins recently updated their website which is now much more interesting and user-friendly. Although largely a sales website, there is also a considerable amount of information available such as on the production of the leather-bound editions, various book reviews and the NN series history.

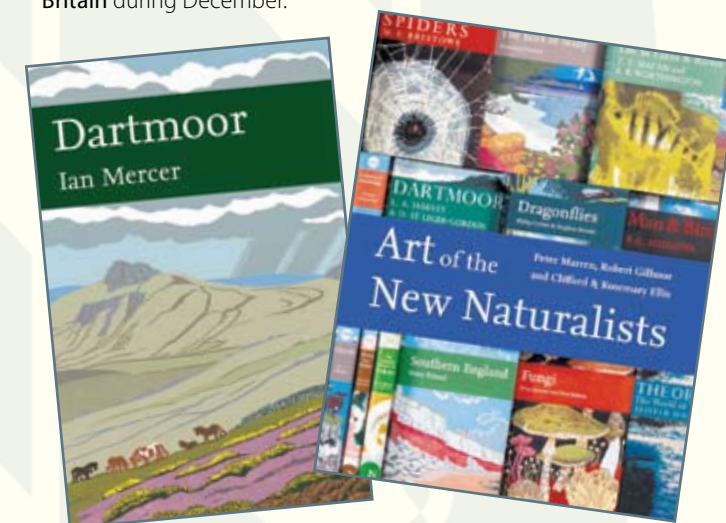
Collins also recently launched their Print on Demand editions. All titles in the New Naturalist library from number 1 **Butterflies** to number 98 **Bumblebees** are now available to order, printed on demand and only available through the HarperCollins website. It is also possible to purchase the complete set at a special discount. There has been some discussion amongst club members and NN collectors that the introduction of POD books will undermine the value of the original editions. However, having seen examples of these POD books, I do not think that this new generation of NNs will affect the second-hand NN market values, indeed it is good that these books will be available once again to be read by naturalists and students who might not otherwise be able to afford the sought after and expensive first editions. This will be particularly the case with titles such as **The Hebrides** and **British Bats**. Working with Martins the Printers, Collins have been careful to ensure that the quality of these books remains of a good standard. These books are the first hand-crafted, full colour print on demand series ever produced. All of the original books and colour plates were digitally scanned (including any printing flaws and errors), and are printed on traditional cream Bookwove, giving them the look and feel of the original books. The plates are printed on gloss art paper and the books are assembled and bound in the traditional way.

The main differences between the original books and the Print on Demand books are that the dust jackets are printed on a high gloss laminated stock. The jackets also state on the rear inside flap that 'This edition is a print on demand edition produced from an original copy by Collins'. Another difference with the jacket is the new price of £50 printed on the front inside flap.

Inside, the books look very similar to the originals. At the foot of the imprint page, once again it is clearly stated that it is a print on demand edition, so there can be no confusion with an original. One final difference is that there is no gold lettering on the spine of the green covers.

On the whole the books are very good. The dust-jackets and colour plates are a little brighter than the originals and perhaps not quite so sharp, however many book collectors will be very pleased to be able to add any missing titles to their NN collections, at a reasonable price and in a format which will sit comfortably with the rest of the series.

New titles to look forward to include **Dartmoor** by Ian Mercer which will be published on 17th September and **The Art of the New Naturalists**, published at the end of October, although advance copies will be available with the book launch at the symposium in Gloucester. The last title for this year will be David Allen's **Nature Publishing in Britain** during December.



The Pinkfoot Gallery at Cley-next-the-Sea in Norfolk will be hosting a second book launch of **The Art of the New Naturalists** on 24th October. This will be combined with a special exhibition of Robert Gillmor's striking jacket designs and a selection of limited edition prints will be available to buy.

For further details contact Sarah or Sophie at the gallery www.pinkfootgallery.co.uk.

Thanks to all those who entered the competition in the spring newsletter. Congratulations go to John Walton and Brian Bewsher who successfully identified the differences between the **Gower** jacket illustrations and who both win tickets to the symposium.

Please send in any articles or adverts for the winter newsletter by the beginning of November.

The One that Got Away

I have just finished reading an excellent book by Patrick Armstrong, 'The English Parson-Naturalist - A Companionship between Science & Religion.' Patrick Armstrong is the son of Edward A. Armstrong, the author of two outstanding books in the New Naturalist series: Monograph No. 3 *The Wren* (1955), and N/N No. 39 *The Folklore of Birds* (1958).

Whilst the author, writes about his father, Edward A. Armstrong (1900-1978), describing him as an ornithologist and student of bird behaviour (complete with a fine photograph of him alighting from a British Airways aircraft, in Reykjavik in 1947, en-route to study the behaviour and ecology of the birds of the Icelandic tundra) there is no mention of his outstanding study of the folklore of birds anywhere in the text.



Patrick Armstrong

I am, as are many others, indebted to Peter Marren, who provides a fine potted biography of Edward Armstrong in his *The New Naturalists* from which I quote: "Priest, theologian and naturalist...one of the latest in England's long line of distinguished parson-naturalists, and an authority on bird song and behaviour...an Ulsterman by birth, trained in philosophy and psychology in Belfast before taking Holy Orders...His meticulous observation won him a lasting reputation as a great bird behaviourist

and a posthumous place in the Dictionary of National Biography. Further books included a classic 'Birds of the Grey Wind' (1942), about Ulster, studies of Shakespeare and St Francis, suggesting that neither worked from personal observation...Bald, meticulous, with a personal sense of wonder, he believed that understanding the interconnectedness of living things helped gain a better insight into the mind of the creator."

In Chapter 6 headed 'A Question of Style' Marren, writes thus: "The *Folklore of Birds* (1958) represented a greater financial risk. The book was a throwback to the optimistic days of the 1940s. The author Edward Armstrong, had a contract, wanted to write the book and was supported in doing so by James Fisher. By 1958, however, book buying habits had changed and such a title was no longer likely to have wide appeal. Nor did it: *The Folklore of Birds* had the shortest shelf life of any mainstream New Naturalist book. Both it and *Insect*

Migration are impeccably scholarly, but there is no denying that they are tough going compared with *Butterflies*, or *Mountains and Moorlands*." This is a view of *The Folklore of Birds* with which I do not concur. Marren's citation for *The Folklore of Birds* (p.333) states: "One of the scarcest in the series, on sale for only four years. On the other hand, those copies that do appear are often in excellent condition. Their price indicates that this is unfortunately a four star book."

There is another interesting link with the New Naturalist Series, in Peter Armstrong's book, namely the Conybeare family and A. W. Boyd, author of *A Country Parish*. Boyd was married to Violet Conybeare to whom he dedicates the book. The Conybeare family produced two eminent geologists of the late Eighteenth/Nineteenth Century: Rev. Professor John Josias Conybeare (1779-1824) Professor of Anglo-Saxon, and later Poetry at Oxford and one of the founder members of the Geological Society, who was also Vicar of Bothesthan and Rev. William Daniel Conybeare, FRS, (1787-1857) who became Dean of Llandaff Cathedral.

Armstrong Patrick (2000) 'The English Parson-Naturalist - A Companionship between Science and Religion, Gracewing Press, £12.99.

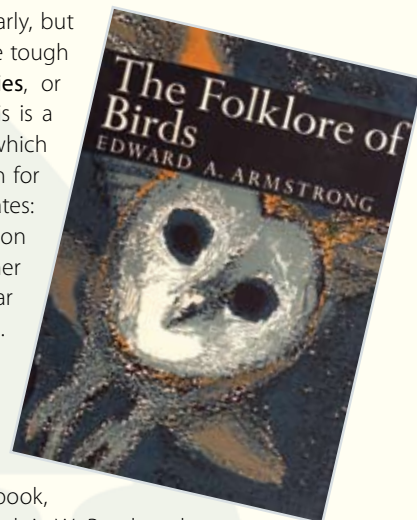
John W. Gittins

A New Naturalist that Never Was

R. L. PRAEGER'S 'NATURAL HISTORY OF IRELAND' COLLINS 1950

Sam Berry writes in the New Naturalists Collectors Club Newsletter, Number 43, Winter 2008 that "Peter Marren mentions a 'pile of Books-that-Never-Were' under the broad heading of 'Loose Ideas'" and poses the question, "What about almost New Naturalists?" citing Robert Lloyd Praeger's 'Natural History of Ireland' (Collins 1950) as an example.

For over forty years, Robert Lloyd Praeger (1865-1953), has been of considerable interest to me. An Ulsterman he was born in Co. Down, the son of a Dutch linen merchant. He was educated at Queen's College, Belfast, was Librarian of the National Library of Ireland from 1920 to 1924 and President of the Royal Irish Academy from 1931 to 1934. He is best known as a botanist though his earliest researches were in geology he also took part in many archaeological investigations. An early stimulus for my interest was meeting Dr. David Cabot, author of the outstanding NN *Ireland*, in 1972, when he was Head of Conservation Research, in the State Institute for Physical Planning in Dublin. Dr. Cabot described RLP as "one of the indomitable class of naturalists who were robust in physique and driven by continuous energy." (NN *Ireland*, page 43). It was Praeger's 'Irish Landscape' published by the Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland (1961) and his outstanding guide to the Irish Countryside published in 1947 under the title of 'The Way that I Went (an Irishman in Ireland)' that really fired my interest when I was undertaking research on the Dingle Peninsula and the Great Blasket Island in the early 1970s.



In the context of this note, I wish Sam Berry could remember the "Somewhere I have read – and wish I could remember where – that Robert Praeger's 'Natural History of Ireland, (op cit) was intended at a N/N, but was rejected somewhere along the line." My mint copy of the 'Natural History of Ireland' published by Collins in 1950, price 25s (£1.50) is complete with dust jacket on the rear of which is printed: 'The First of the New Naturalist's Monographs - *The Badger* by Ernest Neal'. In the back fold of the dust jacket is the following text: 'The New Naturalist - A Survey of British Natural History, Editors: James Fisher, John Gilmour, Julian Huxley, L. Dudley Stamp, Eric Hosking. Volumes Already Published: No.1 *Butterflies* by E. B. Ford; No.2 *British Game* by Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald, No.3 *London's Natural History* by R. S. R. Fitter, No. 4 *Britain's Structure and Scenery* by L. Dudley Stamp, No.6 *Natural History in the Highlands and Islands* by F. Fraser Darling, No.8 *Insect Natural History* by A. D. Imms, No.10 *British Plant Life* by W. B. Turrill, No.12 *The Sea Shore* by C. M. Yonge and No.13 *Snowdonia* by Bruce Campbell, F.J. North and Richenda Scott. With No's 5, 7, 9 and 10 not being published until after 1950.

As Collins, the publisher, writes on the front flap of the dust jacket, "The author is a naturalist who has spent a long life in the observation of Irish plants and animals, geology, geography and scenery." It is intriguing to speculate why Praeger's 'Natural History' was not published in the New Naturalist series of books! Will we ever know? Perhaps somewhere in the Collins archives there lies the answer. For that matter, Peter Marren, having worked through the archive may be able to give a lead? Whatever, as Professor R. J. Berry writes in his recently published NN No. 109, *Islands* 2009, page 322: "Praeger was almost an archetype of a New Naturalist." Indeed, for me he was just that.

Life with The New Naturalists - Reflections of a Naturalist and Conservationist

My relationship with the New Naturalists began in or about 1946 when I bought No 1 *Butterflies*. As a boy of about thirteen, I was passionately interested in the natural history of my local area but had very inadequate identification books at the time. I still recall the disappointment felt when I first opened the new book. Far from being helpful or relevant to my boyhood needs it seemed pre-occupied with obscure subjects like genetics and variation. Although I dipped into it I did not read it and it still remains largely unread, sitting forlornly on the bookshelf, minus its dust-jacket and with the spine badly faded. It was not a good start, but little did I know that my life would become so involved with these books and their authors.

On leaving Burton Grammar School a few years later I was, to my amazement, awarded the "Nellie Hatfield Memorial Prize for Science Candidates". Invited to select a book, I chose No 9 *A Country Parish* by Arnold Boyd – probably because the idea of a parish natural history seemed to relate to my own interests. I found it fascinating. Some years later, as an officer of the Nature Conservancy, I was to become closely involved with the "A W Boyd Memorial Observatory" at Rostherne Mere and with Boyd's nephew James Fisher (28 & M6) who had formally opened it. And a few years after that I played host to a gathering of local farmers and others, in that same building, at which Max Nicholson (17) gave a short speech and began by admonishing me for failing to mention, in the introduction, that the National Nature Reserve had been deliberately declared on Brigitte Bardot's birthday!

Over the next few years I gradually picked up a few more NN titles but without any intention of forming a collection. One of the first was *British Game*, a used first edition with the price (7/6d) still pencilled onto the fly-leaf. Other second-hand titles followed, though occasionally I would

buy new if the subject appealed, and gradually a sort of collection emerged as I started to fill the gaps. Being more interested in the contents than the appearance, it is a motley assortment of editions and reprints, many worn and faded, some even ex-public libraries. All but three do have their dust-jackets. In recent years I have bought mainly new on publication, with the help of the Collectors Club.

At the last count I had, without really trying, acquired 87 titles and a few monographs. One or two have hardly been opened but most have been used for reference and a few have been read from cover to cover.

Now, in retirement, as I look at them sitting decoratively on the shelves, I realise how much the books and their authors have enriched my life. Adam Watson (107) was a part-time lab technician that I remember being helped by when I was reading first-year zoology at Aberdeen. Brian Davis (77) was a contemporary there, and is still a friend (his father was a lecturer in the Forestry Department and taught me how to calculate the volume of trees).

On joining the Nature Conservancy in 1960, I quickly met Colin Tubbs (73), and both Max Nicholson and Barton Worthington (15) became important "role models". In my new post I came across Ian Hepburn (24), who generously helped with his knowledge of sites near Oundle School where he taught.

J A Steers (25), Max Walters (5,23 & 80), Ted Ellis (46) and Miriam Rothschild (M7) were all members of the Woodwalton Fen Advisory Committee, of which I was Secretary for several years.

Others that I had contact with during a long career with NC and NCC included Dudley Stamp (4, 31, 45 and 49), Morton Boyd (6 & 76), Deryk Frazer (69), Derek Ratcliffe (92 & 101), James Fisher (28), Neal Campbell (75) and George Peterken (105). Based for a while at Monk's Wood, I worked alongside Norman Moore (41), Ernie Pollard & Max Hooper (58), Ian Newton (55), Ron Merton (51 and M20) and, of course, Kenneth Mellanby (50, 67 & M22).

Around that time my good friend Chris Fuller once took me to meet Bill Condry (47 & 66) at his home; and in about 1962 I had the experience of showing Eric Simms (52, 63 & 78) around Woodwalton Fen, where he taught me how to recognise the song of the lesser Whitethroat. Much later, whilst working for English Heritage, I came to know Oliver Gilbert (86), commissioned Rosemary Parslow (103) to survey some EH properties on the Isles of Scilly, and came across Oliver Rackham (100), Brian Moss (89) and the remarkable Peter Marren (82 & 91).

How's that for a collection?

John Thompson

REVIEW: 'Wildfowl' by David Cabot

460pp, £50 (hb); £30 (pb)
ISBN 9780007146581 (pb); 9780007146598 (pb)

Wildfowl – ducks, geese and swans – are not only some of our favourite birds, but also the most familiar; after all, many of us experienced our first close encounter with wildlife when feeding the ducks.

They have also been studied in more depth than most wild creatures, with countless books and scientific papers on every aspect of their biology. And many books and paintings - notably those of Sir Peter Scott - have revealed their beauty through the medium of art.

All of which sets the author of this latest addition to the Collins New Naturalist series, David Cabot, a challenging task. How can he condense the vast amount of available information on his chosen subject into

