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BEAR ENVIRONMENT

THE MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY OF ENVIRONMENTAL AUTHORS & JOURNALISTS

IN THIS EDITION

Editor's Introduction

Hello again to all of you, welcome to another edition of the Bear News Magazine. Well, this edition is very late for which I apologise, Steve and I have been involved in lots of things this summer and that has put us well behind.

We welcome into our fold several very well known personalities who have strong connections with in the world of wildlife and other associated conservation projects and climate change concern:

Dominic Couzens, Nick Baker, Emma Pocklington, Rachel Bigsby, Sa'idu Sulaiman and Jan Spencer.

These well known writers and journalists join our band of authors and journalists from around the world. We would encourage all our members to exchange views and ideas as to how we can improve our sad volatile world to a much more peaceful one, a wonderful world that we can explore and enjoy and not destroy..

This year as usual Steve, Esther, and I were at the Global Bird Fair. This year we were based in the VIP Green Room where we were able to mix with the well known celebrity naturalists who were giving presentations and talks on their work. Please look out for our film and podcasts on the Global Bird Fair web site and the @GlobalBirdFair YouTube channel.

This edition has a selection of contributions from a few of our members, I would remind all our members to please think about sending us pieces of your work and details of books you have published. If you wish to have your book reviewed, send a copy of it to us and we will put it on our web pages.

Steve has been tied up with editing our podcasts and BirdFair filming, this takes some time as he is also compiling a film about our archaeological dig at Littleborough, in Nottinghamshire, as well as researching megalithic stone circles.

We are also engaged in doing podcasts with a few of our members, and I would like to run a series on our member's backgrounds and interests in this magazine starting in January 2026. If you would like to be included, send us a bit about yourself, upbringing, further education, career to date, current activities and what you'd like to talk about..

In the meantime I wish you all the best and please keep in touch.

ROBERT TANSEY FLS

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A Vertical Nature Reserve

Why My Poor Building Skills Are Great For Wildlife, by Adam Clayton.

There are times in life when only the best will do. A perfectly risen souffle, a virtuoso musical performance, or even a well-mixed cocktail. This isn't one of those times.

I'm repairing a section of drystone wall that has gradually tumbled down after years of neglect. Northern England is laced with these boundary walls, and skilled craftspeople can spend a whole career perfecting the technique.

This wall needs to offer protection and mark its boundary, but I also want it to act as a linear habitat for the local wildlife — a vertical nature reserve.

Inside the wall, adding support to the main stones, are the "heartings". These smaller stones pack out the wall and shore up the structure. My first act of rebellion against perfection is to remove some of these stones and fashion a space for new inhabitants.

Next, I leave slightly wider gaps in the main face of the wall. A professional dry stone waller would take me to task, but I've got another audience in mind.

Our agricultural landscape can be a harsh place for wildlife, and this wall will provide shelter and protection to a large range of plants and animals. Take the little Wren. Its Latin name is Troglodytes troglodytes which means "cave dweller". The clue is in the name! By leaving spaces in the wall, I'm creating space for these little birds to nest and forage. Not only that, but they will be able to drop down to the lower stories of the wall and feed on the invertebrates living at the base of the structure. A full larder of insects, spiders, and larvae awaits.

Other animals will also make use of the shelter and gaps in the wall. Weasels and stoats will work their way along its length hunting for prey, and voles will hide in cracks hiding from predators — life and death played out on the field boundary.

Depending on the time of year you might find sheep packed in against the stones sheltering from the winter wind, or in its shade in the heat of the summer. Today, at lunchtime, you might also see another mammal, this one a biped making use of the sunny side of the wall for his lunch, taking in the scenery on a well-earned break.

On and around a drystone wall, especially an old wall, you will most likely see displays of lichens, mosses, and ferns. I've seen walls so completely covered that they look to all the world like miniature rainforests— dripping with greenery and heavy with damp, perfumed air.

Walls can divide, but they can also bring a community together, and when I'm repairing a wall I'm at the heart of a community. We need to learn to look closer at these man-made lines in the landscape. They might be artificial, but they're bristling with life.

I finish the repair, head home, and wait for the new inhabitants to move in. A perfectly imperfect day's work.

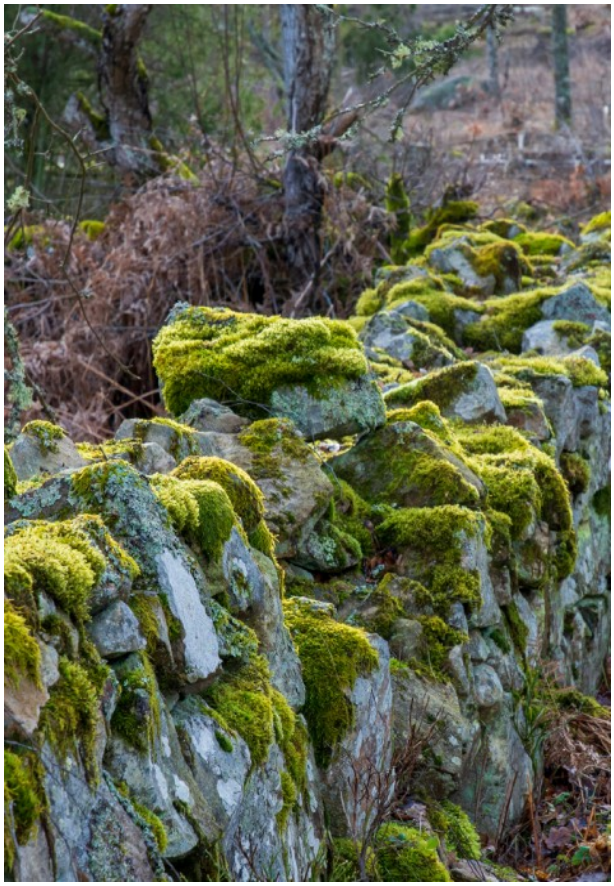


Photo credit Ingemar Johnsson on Unsplash

How You Can Support Your Pollinators

by Alethea Kehas

Three-quarters of the plants we use for food worldwide depend upon pollination, yet climate change and commercial agricultural practices are putting a heavy strain on our pollinators. What can you do as a consumer to ensure that pollinators not only survive, but thrive in years to come?

Perhaps the first and simplest step you can take is to eliminate the use of chemicals in your yard and gardens. This will not only benefit the wellbeing of the bees, butterflies, bats, and pollinating animals in your local area, but your health as well. Extending this practice to the foods you consume will help ensure the diversity and abundance of species on a more global scale.

Whether you live in an urban or rural environment, there are additional steps you can take to increase the diversity and fecundity of pollinators around you, such as:

- Consider planting a pollinator garden in your yard or on your rooftop or patio using a range of native and non-invasive species to support diversity and ensure a continuous blooming time.
- Donate your time or money to organizations that support pollinator health, such as pollinator.org
- Start a pollinator garden in our local community or school, or donate your time to an existing one.
- Encourage your family, friends, neighbours, and elected officials to support pollinator health locally and globally.
- Be gentle and mindful with the environment when you are recreating in nature.
- Educate yourself on what pollinators are important to your area and how you can help to preserve local species diversity.
- Ensure that the land you reside upon provides ample food, water, and shelter for your local pollinating insects and animals. For example, Environment America offers some easy ways to create “bee hotels” in your yard.
- Consider turning your lawn into a pollinator garden.
- And, take daily steps to combat climate change and the preservation of vital resources such as water. The Climate Change Council suggests the following five ways you can help tackle climate change:
    - Walk, bike, or take public transport
    - Reduce your consumption of red meat
    - Invest your money in institutions that support green energy
    - Cut down on your food waste
    - Be energy conscious

Feed the Birds

Jackdaws by Janice Johnson

We currently live in an upside-down house in the Malvern Hills with panoramic views from our balcony to the countryside. We have a variety of animals and birds living here, including long-tailed tits, great tits, blue tits, blackbirds, hedge sparrows, house-sparrows (sadly, not that many anymore), and robins. We also have visiting swifts, and spend summer evenings sitting on the balcony, counting how many there are until they leave. It is a sad fact that we have seen their numbers decline over the years.

The trees surrounding us mean that we have a number of resident larger breed birds - pigeons, jackdaws, magpies and one solitary carrion crow. These are so intelligent that they know if we've had a takeaway and wait for the chips to arrive on their feeding table. It certainly helps my diet, but we are obviously careful what we put out for them.

What I really enjoy watching is the personalities of the bird breeds coming out at feeding time. A normal scenario would go like this:

- Terry chops up the chips and puts them on the table whilst being watched from the treetops.
- The solitary crow turns up first and very cautiously takes his fill.
- Then the jackdaws come along – generally in pairs or groups and fill their beaks before flying off into the surrounding trees waiting for their next 'go'.
- Magpies are next. They are nervous and approach from the gutter and end up dropping more than they pick up.
- Finally, the pigeons arrive. Always led by the head honcho who sits on the table puffed up and preening, allowing his minions to pick around the edges. They waddle along the railing to the feeding tray and drop even more than the magpies.
- When the jackdaws return, there is often a stand-off. "You looking at me?" The pigeon puffs up and wobbles but usually stands back, letting the jackies take their pick. There is never a fight (unless it's the pigeons having a squabble amongst themselves). However, there is definitely a pecking order.

The smaller birds aren't forgotten. They have their own feeding area, which is set so the larger birds can't access the seeds or food. However, they do love a wander along the balcony picking up the bits the pigeons have chucked everywhere.

I've always been scared of anything that might land on me but was brought up to love and respect all nature, even if it was at a distance. Since living here, I've become a lot braver and even held a small owl on my arm at a garden centre.

That's the introduction to me and birds. For this particular article, I shall now focus on a few jackdaw facts.

- Jackdaws are the smallest members of the crow family, measuring 34cm long, with a wingspan of 70cm and weighing 220g.
- They are black with a light grey nape and pale white irises. Young birds are born without the grey nape and with blue-grey eyes, which change to brown in the first winter and then to white, once they gain their adult plumage.
- A flock of jackdaws is called a "clattering" or a "train".
- There are 1.4 million pairs resident in the UK.
- Like the rest of the crow family, they are at home in woodland, farmland, and urban landscapes.
- They are highly intelligent, social creatures, and can often be seen working out how to access bird feeders. This intelligence helps them to survive in the urban environment.
- They are colonial cavity nesters. Colonial means that they nest and breed in close proximity, as a group. Cavity nesters build nests, lay eggs, and raise young inside sheltered chambers or cavities. Jackdaws will use any construction with a cavity, e.g. a hole in a tree, a chimney or even an owl box.
- Jackdaws use sticks to construct the outside of the nest and then line it with wool or hair.
- Like many of the crow family, jackdaws form strong pair bonds with their mates and are devoted to their chosen partner, even if unsuccessful at breeding.

- They breed between April and July and only have one brood per year. Their eggs take 20 days to incubate, and the chicks fledge at 32-33 days.
- Jackdaws roost and feed together. They will often encourage others to come along to a good feeding source.
- Their food depends on location, and they have a varied diet. In nature, they eat seeds, fruit, and invertebrates (e.g. insects, worms, slugs). They will pick at roadkill, like other members of the crow family, and may even take other birds' eggs.
- The sound of the jackdaw is a simple 'jack-jack'. However, some people have been successful in teaching them to make different sounds.
- Often kept as pets, they are incredibly intelligent and versatile. It is worth checking out YouTube for jackdaws making different noises, playing with dogs and cats, and feeding from the hand.

Jan with a rescue owl.

Nature often inspires the poet in me. I wrote this whilst watching the scene play out in a Welsh pub garden.

Blue skies surround them
As they call for back-up from their clatter
Why have they decided to nest here
In chimney pots?

Now there are three
Shiny black, proud, and strong
"Jack, Jack, Jack"
Another four arrive and circle the seagull

So close, yet still far
From the nesting mother

The seagull now calls
He can't give up those glorious, rich eggs
And a friend comes to his aid
But they are no match for the jackdaws

A scurry, a flurry, of screeching and feathers
Send the gulls away, high in the sky

Mum pokes her head up from the chimney pot
All clear?
Yes dear

And one by one the jackdaws leave
Happy that their friends are safe
For now.

The Spider Ball

by Robbie Cheadle

Behind a rotting board
A misshapen ball
Pulsating with life; dark silhouettes wriggling
Protected by soft web
The mother's life work
***
In the dimness they grow
Increasing in strength
Those with greater confidence start to explore
Running along the threads
Pushing boundaries
***
Ready for life alone
They prepare to leave
Climbing up high they release several strands
And float gently away
Life's an adventure

Close up of a Golden Orb female spider and the much smaller male

Golden Orb Spiders

by Robbie Cheadle

Close up of a Golden Orb Spider. You can clearly see the orb in the centre and the golden thread.

Spiders get a lot of negative press everywhere. Recently, there have been a number of poems about spiders on WordPress and all of them paint spiders as scary creatures which do much harm to humans. I decided to write this post as a tribute to spiders which actually do a lot of good in this world. There are some venomous spiders, but these are in the minority. Thousands of spiders die at the hand of humans due to ignorance and unfounded fear.

The spider I am focusing on for this post is the South African Golden Orb Spider. From March to May, the Golden Orb Spider is an outstanding feature of the NorthWest province in South Africa. Hundreds of these large spiders can be seen everywhere, spinning and guarding their webs, and doing what spiders do which is catching and consuming prey, usually insects, and reproducing.

The female of this species is 1,000 times bigger than the male. The female spins the web and allows several males to cohabit on the web. The males are usually found at the top of the web while the female sits at the hub, facing downwards, and waiting for insects to become trapped in the web. She then wraps the insect in web to immobilise it, kills it with one bite, and moves it to the centre of the web for immediate consumption or to store in her 'larder'. I know you are thinking this is cruel but think about the contents of your own freezer. I often think that if the Martians from War of the Worlds arrived on Earth now, they would have had no conscience about eating people after peeping into the average freezer which is stuffed full of meat.

The web of this spider is beautiful. Its yellow threads shine like gold in the sunlight to attract insects, especially bees, and blends with the background foliage in shady spots, thereby camouflaging the web. The spider is able to adjust the pigment intensity to match with background light levels and colour. This spider is a real artist.

About Climate Change

by Carola Huttman

Climate change has occurred as long as human beings have roamed the Earth, as long as their thoughtless actions have influenced our planet's biodiversity — that is the balance, maintenance and sustainability of and between plants, sea and animals. Commonly, climate change is deemed to have made the most significant impact since the start of the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century, but altering weather patterns caused by mankind can be traced back as far as the Neolithic period (c.10,000 BC to c.2,000 BC) when a major shift in lifestyle occurred, from a hunter-gatherer way of life to one of settlement and the introduction of farming. There can be no blame, of course, but ignorance and early experimentation meant the people of the Second (or New) Stone Age employed farming practices which exploited the land, rather than conserved it.

Mining, too, has a much longer history than many people realise. It not only produces some of the highest levels of carbon emissions, but through the creation of shafts also alters the balance of the soil and earth density. The ancient Egyptians dug for malachite and other minerals as early as 4000 BCE. In China evidence of coal mining can be found as early as 3490 BCE. In Ancient Greece coal mining began in the seventh century BCE and seems to have continued at least until the first century BCE. The Romans were the first miners in Britain, sourcing coal as well as metals like lead, copper, gold, silver, and tin, materials that were in high demand as the Roman Empire was established.

Now we are a quarter of a century into the new millennium, only the most hard-core individual will deny the obvious signs of climate change witnessed increasingly in all regions across the globe. Rising temperatures, an ever growing number of droughts, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, the melting ice cap in Greenland, the warming of our seas, alteration of acidic levels in our oceans. The target threshold of temperature rises of 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, established at COP25 in 2015 and known as the Paris Agreement, a treaty in which 195 nations pledged to tackle climate change is becoming increasingly hard to maintain. In October 2023 Damian Carrington, Environment Editor of The Guardian newspaper, wrote that a rapid ice melt in west Antarctica is now practically inevitable.

The main sources of marine pollution originate ashore, but lead to a seemingly unstoppable flow of litter, waste and run-off into the ocean. In 2021, a study by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) estimated that more than 17 million metric tons of plastic entered the world's ocean, making up the bulk (85 per cent) of marine litter. The volume of plastic pollution entering the ocean each year is expected to double or triple by 2040, threatening all marine life. At the same time it must be understood that centuries of increased urbinisation with its proliferation of high carbon lifestyles have transformed the landscape into a precarious and vulnerable environment. The International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) has predicted that between 2018 and 2050, the number of urban residents globally is projected to increase by 2.5 billion, an increase by more than 50 per cent.

Climate Change has become increasingly politicised as governments and world leaders are urged to take action and set examples, not only to their own electorate, but to other nations. The annual Conference of the Parties (COP) first instigated by the United Nations (UN) in 1995, is an annual opportunity for government leaders to assess progress made so far and to try to reach new agreements for climate change sustainability. Because climate politics is framed over the long term, say 2050 or 2100, it can be difficult for leaders to maintain the motivation and momentum necessary to effect climate change limitation. Furthermore, countries have different visions of what their ideal society and future look like.

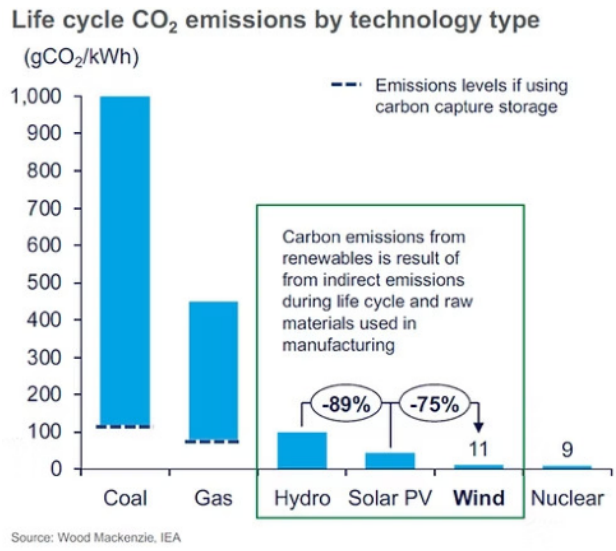
The world's inequalities make the quest for global sustainability almost an impossibility. The desire for sustainability in one place might actually accelerate socio-ecological disintegration and 'unsustainability' in another if they happen to be economically or climatically interdependent in one way or another. The Nordic countries, with Norway in particular, face this issue. The liberation of oil and gas from the North Sea brings great financial gains while also releasing tonnes of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere that will have consequences worldwide.

When it comes to our daily lives the demands made by our overly consumerist society play a large part in climate change. Known as the digital revolution, the manufacture and use of computers, mobile phones and all manner of other digital devices which have a limited lifespan and end up being incinerated or in landmines, not to mention our ongoing perceived need to have products made from plastic will continue relentlessly, no matter how vehemently scientists, activists and governments urge manufacturers to produce goods from alternative, more sustainable materials.

The IT industry is one of the world's heaviest consumers of electrical power and associated carbon emissions double every four years. Often it sources electricity produced in coal-fired plants. The manufacture of so-called high-technology equipment is also very carbon-intensive and, at the time of writing, the full impact on workers and the environment is not yet fully understood. The production of fast fashion — cheaply-made clothing frequently only worn once before being discarded — tells a similar story with an equally detrimental impact on both employees and the environment.

Creating sustainability in an effort to reduce climate change is, however, a double-edged sword, for in order to produce technology that might help limit releasing carbon emissions into the atmosphere and move closer to net zero targets during our lifetime and that of future generations, the processes to do so are just as power intensive as those in the industries discussed above. The rise in the popularity and use of electric vehicles bears this out. Most significantly, perhaps, is the burgeoning renewals industry, such as wind and tidal energy. Although the manufacture of solar panels, wind turbines and tidal devices inevitably carry a carbon footprint, this is compensated and almost entirely negated once the equipment is operational and producing natural sources of energy.

The chart shows the typical carbon emissions issued by the different energy sources.



Studies by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) suggest that offshore wind energy produces 8 –35 grams of carbon dioxide (CO2) or its equivalent (CO2eq) per kilowatt hour (kWh) of electricity generated (gCO2eq/kWh). To put that in perspective, their estimates for other sources of energy are:

Coal = 740–910 gCO2eq/kWh

Natural gas = 410–650 gCO2eq/kWh

Rooftop solar = 24–60 gCO2eq/kWh

Sustainability concerns alter over time and space. Consequently innovation must be recast as more creative and pragmatic responses are required. To effect the radical changes that will bring about meaningful reductions in harmful carbon emissions in the long term, we human beings must alter our thinking and priorities. We need to find alternative, more sustainable ways of living. We need to become less materialistic and find and nurture our intrinsic eco-conscious selves. We owe it to ourselves, to our children, our grandchildren and great-grandchildren ad infinitum. If animals could speak a language that we stupid human beings could understand they would surely tell us there is no time to waste. Human activity over millennia has damaged the planet beyond repair, but it is still not too late to instigate limitation strategies. It is the globally most vulnerable and insecure nations which experience the effects of climate change most acutely. It is ironic, then, that it is these communities who contribute the least damage to the planet.

Let's encourage the world's wealthy countries to look to them and through working and learning together find ways to make the world a greener, more sustainable environment for all, employing equally ancient knowledge and traditions, Earth's natural resources – sun, wind and water – and the latest technological innovations which the renewables industry can offer to harvest and utilise those resources.

Global BirdFair 2025

by Dr Robert Tansey

Another year the great Global BirdFair has come and gone, where did all that time go and how different this year is to the many before? In the past we always have had to take our tough boots and so often wellingtons, the weather just was not predictable, so what was different this year? Well it's the climate change that is occurring all over the world, for us in the UK it was the heat and very dry, arid conditions. The showground was dried out completely, it's the first time I can remember going to the Bird Fair wearing shorts and light tops for three solid days.

From our perspective as environmental authors and journalists, it brings to the fore the warnings scientists and environmentalists have been shouting about for many years, and some of us have been campaigning about. But no matter how loud we hear the cries of our children and ourselves, our countries leaders fail to act. Despite promises most countries can't act or won't. Why, because everyone has their own hidden agenda, greed overrides everything else, the natural world becomes but a minor concern to those whose aim is making money to enable the rich moguls to get even richer. The top ten percent are always at the top pressing all the buttons as they control the world and us.

I have almost given up, on trying to save this delicate world, but these very conditions whilst bringing death and destruction to many give us a little hope that mankind will survive. We see the ice caps retreating and research stations in the polar regions closing down for first time for the winter periods, because they can't predict the next few months.

But for those of us who seek to find out about life on earth thousands of years ago, what palaeolithic finds will be exposed by these retreating ice fields, what fascinating facts will we find out.

The Bird Fair brings together hundreds of people from all over the planet to share their stories, to tell us of their culture, to inform us of the problems their wild fauna and flora are going through. Many tell of their successes, it's not all doom and gloom, the world is an exciting place to visit and gain new experiences, the bird fair is the ideal place to start such a journey.

This year I visited the fair in the company of my co-trustees of the Society of Authors and Journalists, Steve Shelley and Esther Chilton. We were there to film various aspects of Bird Fair and to podcast some of the many interesting people we met including some of the world's better known naturalists.

The Society now officially runs the Global BirdFair Podcast, which was situated in the prestigious Green Room. Esther and Steve did most of the interviews, and in particular Esther on her first visit to the show excelled, several interviewees commented on how pleasant and easy to talk to she was.

Some of our interviewees will be put out as individual podcasts, others may find they are included in the main bird fair film. See @GlobalBirdFair on YouTube.

Some of those we talked with included Nigel Marven who brought his menagerie of animals with him, Simon King who showed us some of his photographic master pieces, and Mike Dilger as entertaining as usual. Our own David Chandler told us how his career developed into him becoming a wildlife guide and writer. We also spoke to the RSPB's International Director Dr Jo Gilbert, and Becky Ingham of Action for Swifts where we viewed swift boxes. We were pleased to interview Lucy Hodson (Lucy Lapwing) one of the young rising stars of the natural world. Stephen Moss was as always everywhere trying to do six things at once when he was not on stage. Two brilliant volunteers I must mention are Nigel Scott and Mark Maddox who produce and keep things in order on the Osprey Stage.

We interviewed many more individual personalities including a few of the vast team of volunteers who keep the whole thing going year after year. We really appreciated the help given to us by the ladies in the green room, who were responsible for catering to the VIP speakers who were on stage in the Osprey Marquee.

So as usual Tim Appleton and Penny Robinson who are in charge of everything that happens at the Global Bird Fair put on another spectacular show, we all owe them and their team of volunteers a huge praise of thanks. Not forgetting the many celebrity guests, and the sponsors of the show. This Bird Fair first set up by Tim around thirty years ago has been replicated by countries around the world by dedicated conservationists.

The five main marquees were: Nightingale, Robin, Kingfisher, Puffin, and Swallow. You could visit these various stands to look at wildlife art, wildlife crafts, wildlife travel firms, wildlife gardens etc. Others had the various wildlife charities such as the RSPB, Wildlife Trusts, British Trust for Ornithology, etc, all putting on their best show for us all to enjoy, and in some cases encourage us to join them.

Other marquees such as Falcon and Hobby had a full range of optics on display to be handled and tried out. There were many special prices for people attending the fair. Canon, Sony, Nikon and many other optical manufacturers were splendidly set out. It was the time to pick up a bargain.

The Young Conservationists Hub was well attended they had a regular array of speakers including Emma Pocklington, an Editor of the RSPB magazine. On Friday they were given an insight to the Rutland Osprey Project by Roy Dennis, Tim Mackrill and Becky Park.

The Discovery Zone set up for mainly young visitors put on many interactive displays so that young people could learn about wildlife.

In the main lecture theatres Osprey, Avocet, Curlew, and Plover, well known and not so well known speakers presented talks and films of their field work. Simon King, Nick Baker, Nigel Marven, Dominic Couzens, were just a few of the celebrity guests. From Springwatch, we saw Jack Baddams, Lucy Lapwing, Megan McCubbin and Humphrey Keeper.

We did quite a few podcasts with various individuals including Lucy Lapwing, Dominic Couzens, Nigel Marven and many others.

But what was the fair all about? Its prime aim is to raise money for conservation projects around the world. This years fundraising is for Safeguarding Ocean Species: the Antipodean Albatross and other threatened species in the South Pacific.

This is but a tiny glimpse of what was to be seen at the 2025 Global BirdFair. I would encourage all our readers wherever possible to attend this annual international event. Look out for other similar events occurring all over the world instigated by our own Tim Appleton. The one personality I miss seeing at this event is the well known wildlife presenter Bill Oddie, but like a few of us, he is getting a bit too old to attend on a regular basis now.

The Taš Tepeler Phenomenon

by Steve Shelley

In a hilly region of Upper Mesopotamia, dozens of stone mounds dot the stark landscape. They call them 'taš tepeler' in Turkish. But more than mere mounds, these 'tepes' are typically entire hilltops from which vast ancient constructions are being unearthed, revealed as elaborate ceremonial centres.

Sites like Göbekli Tepe and Karahan Tepe comprise a network of stone circles ringed with characteristic t-shaped pillars. They spread over a wide area, challenging archaeological investigation and raising important questions about their construction and use.

Sites appear to encompass domestic areas, food preparation and serving areas, and enclosures with a kind of terrazzo flooring with drain holes that might indicate their use as water cisterns or pools. Enigmatic carven statues and frescoes give tantalising clues which, so far, have defied full explanation.

T-pillars at Göbekli Tepe

Although scattered over hundreds of square kilometres of south eastern Turkey, these sites show remarkable similarities, displaying images of animals such as foxes, boars and scorpions, and statues of males apparently engaged in active phallic activity.

Historically, this part of ancient Anatolia has long formed an important crossroads. It encompasses the city of Urfa – now Šanliurfa, formerly known as Edessa in Roman times – which is considered locally to be the birthplace of Abraham. Nearby, in the middle of a vast fertile plain, lies Harran, also of biblical fame. Cultural influences have flowed to and from Sumer in Lower Mesopotamia, across the Levant to Egypt, and through multiple waves of occupation from Persia and Armenia in the east.

Not far away is Lake Van and the Taurus Mountains where the snow-capped cone of Mount Ararat towers over the land. Here, a curious geological formation in the image of an outline of a boat has been offered as the fossilised remains of Noah's Ark.

This is Ground Zero for European civilisation as we know it. Or as we thought we knew it . . . these 'tepes' are not just biblical era, they date back nearly twelve thousand years, not just old but highly significant too. Because this date coincides with the cataclysmic Younger Dryas Impact Event.

At this precise time in human history, the earth passed through the tail of a comet, causing a prolonged storm of meteors which exploded in air bursts, raining molten glass spherules and laying waste to large areas of the planet. In North America, glacial ice dams broke, unleashing floods across the landscape whose ripples in the earth can still be seen as the so-called channeled scablands of Washington State. Released from the weight of the ice, the earth heaved. Volcanoes erupted, pouring their debris into the atmosphere. Sea levels surged.

A black layer in the archaeological record shows extensive burning in widely diverse locations. The presence of 'nano diamonds' confirms localised temperatures of thousands of degrees. Trees and grass burned. Large mammals died out. And humans were chased underground, or to wherever they could find refuge.

According to ice core records, global temperatures then plummeted as a result of all that dirt and dust in the air. But slowly, after several centuries, the climate stabilised and life recovered.

Our ancestors feared they had displeased the sky gods. They vowed it must never happen again. And so they devised ways of propitiating them.

These events – the comet impact, the destruction and recovery of life, and the construction of ceremonial 'sky temples' – marked a turning point in human history which leads traceably to

everything that has happened since. It also had an important side effect. Coming together to observe the heavens and conduct rituals meant that large numbers of people had to be fed. The Taš Tepeler site of Çayönü Tepesi tells the tale of a shift from hunting aurochs, gazelles and boar to planting crops and domesticating sheep, goats and cattle.

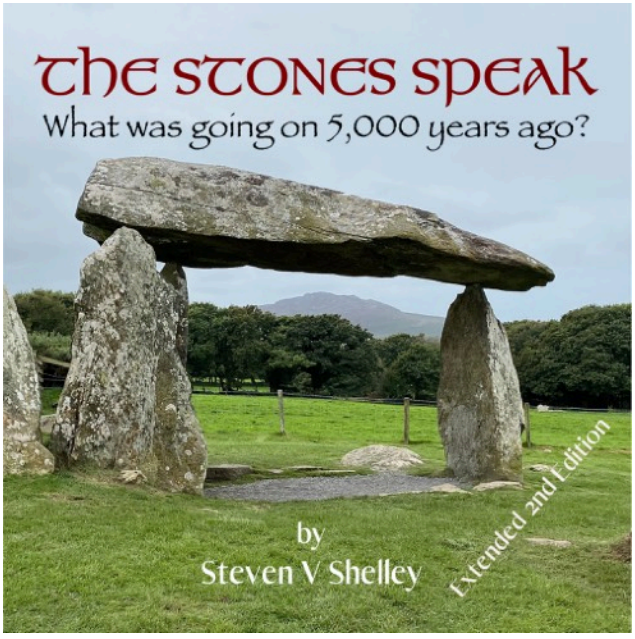
According to Dr. Savaş Sarıaltun, head of the Çayönü Tepesi excavation team, the site is globally recognised as the first location where humanity's shift from hunting and gathering to agriculture and permanent settlement is vividly documented.

Archaeologists have also uncovered a terrazzo floor and a ceramic pipe system constructed using interlocking terracotta segments. Dr Sarıaltun says this shows the presence of a centralised authority or elite group capable of designing and organising such construction.

You could say the same for all the 'tepe' sites. And all this was more than ten thousand years ago.

Now, this part of Turkey is barren semi-desert. The developmental milestones they've uncovered here echo the shifting climate over all those millennia. Archaeology and climatology converge to show that you can't put climate change on the back burner for political expediency when demonstrably it has been the greatest single influence on human development.

The red terrazzo at Çayönü Tepesi



Steve's new extended second edition of The Stones Speak is now available through Amazon:

https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B0DTP12V8L

The story revealed by Turkey's ancient sites will appear in 'Written in the Stars', a work in progress.

Into the Cold

by Sarah Warburton

Shivering, I stare down at my strangely glowing white feet through the translucent, green-tinged water. "Maybe I need to get a new hobby. One where I don't get this cold," I mutter to myself as I inch deeper into the lake. With a deep breath, I launch myself forward, plunge my face into the icy water, and start swimming out towards the red buoy for the first time this season.

Research shows that even before the pandemic, open water swimming was growing in popularity in the UK—and its rise has only continued since. The reasons behind this are many, encompassing a wide a range of physical and mental health benefits.

But for many swimmers, it's the closeness to nature that makes open water swimming truly special. When asked what types of swims mattered most to them, 84% of respondents in an Outdoor Swimming Society (OSS) survey responded "scenic swims with a focus on landscape and nature."

That certainly rings true for me. Today's swim brought me within metres of two swans and for a precious few minutes, we all swam companionably in the same direction. Later, I floated on my back, gazing at the sky and the trees surrounding the lake, savouring the feeling of the water against my skin. For me, it's moments like these that make open water swimming a cut above swimming up and down in a chlorinated pool.

This appreciation for the natural world often extends beyond the water. The same OSS survey found that 53% of swimmers pick up litter at beaches or swim spots, and 50% have made lifestyle changes to help protect blue spaces because of their swimming habit.

Yet even as swimmers grow more connected to nature, concern over water quality looms large. Spend time at an open water spot and you're bound to hear conversations about pollution. Just a few weeks ago, Henley Swim—organiser of some of the UK's most high-profile mass participation open water events, taking place in the River Thames—announced it was bankrupt. The cited reason? Ongoing fears about the cleanliness of Thames that had deterred thousands of potential event entrants, leaving the business unsustainable.

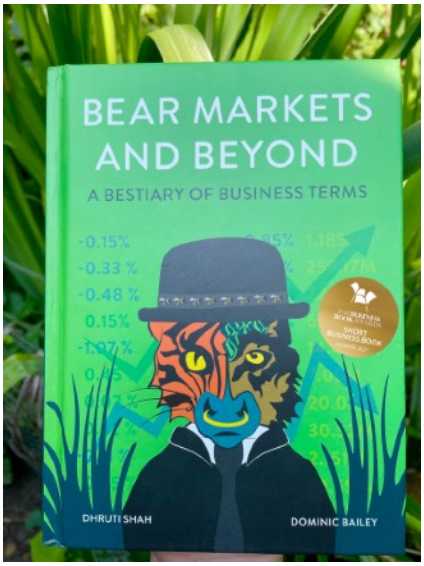
This highlights a deeper truth: enjoying these wild spaces comes with a responsibility to protect them. Across the UK, swimmers, campaigners, and communities are pushing for cleaner waterways—through activism, clean-up efforts, and political pressure. It's a long road, but one worth swimming.

As for me, forty minutes later I emerge from the water grinning from ear to ear and already planning my next swim. Perhaps I'll stick with this hobby a little longer after all!

A new podcast opportunity for members

DHRUTI SHAH is an experienced writer who agreed to be the first member to appear on the Society's podcast Bear Essentials (see @BearEssentials on YouTube). Dhruti has co-authored an intriguing award-winning book entitled 'Bear Markets and Beyond', a name coincidentally aligned with our own!

Described as a Bestiary of Business Terms, Dhruti explains: "Animals have always exerted a strong hold on our imagination. You only have to look at prehistoric cave paintings to see how central they were to our existence and, in capturing these images and using them to pass on messages to the community, we can see how they were our first linguistic tools and shaped our relationship with each other."



Watch Dhruti's interview on YouTube: https://youtu.be/9db6rWXpp2s

We would like to feature more members on Bear Essentials, so if you're up for an appearance, please let us know. You're welcome to shamelessly pitch your own publications if you wish!