

# Wyre Forest Study Group

## Wayside, Trackside and Woodland: a natural history

JOHN COX

Naturalists are a bookish tribe: even in the age of apps, the latest field guide is a must-have. Yet there is still space on our shelves for those first volumes that fostered our interest. One of mine was L Hugh Newman's *Moths on the Wing* (1950), published and printed in Leicester where I lived. Another treasured possession is my father's copy of T A Coward's *The Birds of The British Isles and their Eggs* in Warne's Wayside and Woodland series. A gift from my mother that, years later, became my armchair companion. Dad had a general interest in natural history; but our local trips did not produce those birds that Coward made me long to see. No Marsh Harrier, no Crossbill ... just dreams. We did find a Tree Pipit's nest and also a Yellowhammer's nest (which he called the Scribbling Lark).

Please note: I did not collect bird's eggs.



Other memories include finding a Garden Tiger Moth in a nearby spinney, watching Great Spotted Woodpeckers at nest, and nearly getting bitten by an Adder. A favourite place to visit was Bradgate Park, just outside Leicester: this Elizabethan deer park had been the home of Lady Jane Grey. Family picnics there brought close encounters with both Fallow and Red Deer, involved searching for White-clawed Crayfish in the stream and just enjoying the habitat.

Everything changed in 1957. At my Junior School the leaver's trip was a history trail through Leicestershire; and I still have the workbook we had to complete to show we had benefitted from this treat! One site visited was, inevitably, Bradgate Park. My best friend, Alan

Smith, went to a different school. His trip was by train to London and he came back a trainspotter. "John, I am going trainspotting. Come with me." I did, and it was love at first sight. To my several Warne's Observer's Series nature titles I added the Observer's book of British Railway Locomotives. That was my life from 1957 to 1963. Then that year I met Christina.

In 1964 I went to Hull University to read Theology. Christina and I married in 1970 while I was teaching at Walthamstow Senior High School for Girls. That year I also joined the RSPB. We shortly afterwards moved to Birmingham where I trained for ordination. I joined the West Midland Bird Club; its field meetings secretary was Arthur Jacobs and he lived just around the corner from us. Getting to know Arthur and Joyce Jacobs (they married in 1975) and, amongst others, Eric Phillips was a real education. Friendship was renewed in 1983 when we came to Worcestershire. I did not know at my ordination in Amersham in 1973 that I would officiate at the funerals of Joyce and Arthur in 2012, and Eric in 2015. Arthur and Joyce have a memorial in the reserve at Upton Warren. Eric's memorial seat is usefully placed along the old railway line in the Wyre.



Those Birmingham days saw bus trips to Bewdley and visits into the Wyre. One contact with the area was less pleasant: a WMBC outing by private car to Hilbre Island. I had a lift and there were three of us in the car that was hit by another just outside Shatterford! Awaiting rescue by the roadside at least we had Crossbills overhead.



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The insurance paid for a wonderful weekend trip to Norfolk led by Arthur Jacobs.



Wyre Forest Station 1961

John Cox

From Brum to Buckingham and twitching and ringing with local author Henry Mayer-Gross. A highlight was a trip to Packington to see Britain's first White-tailed Plover. Then on to Reading where we lived close to Manor Farm sewage works. A memorable spring morning saw a fall of 23 Whinchats. Some of you might remember the notorious and newsworthy story of the

birders showered with pig slurry by a local farmer. They were trespassing in their attempts to see a Black-winged Pratincole. How we locals laughed!

I became Vicar of Chaddesley Corbett and Stone in 1983, retiring in 2010. My main interest remained birds; but I soon realized that friends like Arthur, Eric and Steve Whitehouse had much broader interests. Childhood memories were reawakened: Mervyn and Rosabelle Needham got me into moth trapping. They also spoke of a mysterious group that met on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Those days were work days for me until retirement. Then I discovered it was the WFSG and began a learning curve that may always be steep but also always very enjoyable.

It is always a delight to walk down to Trimpley reservoirs or to potter about the Devil's Spittleful. Why? Because I can combine wayside and woodland with trackside, nature study and trainspotting. Warne's were clever publishers: alongside books like Coward's *Birds* they produced a companion volume in C J Allen's *Railways of Today*!

