

In the Beginning... there were Flowers!

HARRY GREEN

How did it all start, this life-long obsession with natural history? I can't really remember the very beginning. I have a few snapshot recollections: walking as a very small boy with my mother down a small sunny valley with lots of flowers in the grass and a scattering of bushes is one. Another is a school exhibition with flowers in test tubes set in a row of wooden racks with each flower carefully labelled by me. How did I learn the names? I've no idea but I guess my mother told me and they were simply absorbed by a young receptive brain. Another is walking through a meadow full of flowers and butterflies. The next and perhaps most important recollection is of wandering in school grounds when I was around ten years old and coming upon young thrushes barely able to fly on the turf of a tennis court attended by parents who immediately started shrieking alarm calls at me. Suddenly a man arrived, dashed forward and gathered up the young birds. "Mistle Thrushes" he said and whisked me and the birds a hundred yards to his house, placed rings on their legs and rushed them back to the parents. I was hooked! The man was biology master Arnold Darlington who had just returned after the war.

Amazing years followed. His lessons on all the groups of plants and animals were brilliant. His great interest in birds and bird ringing and getting us kids involved was fascinating. October nights out in the countryside listening for migrating Redwings and carefully recording the time of each call all plotted on a chart next day. Catching a Swift at a nest, taking it miles away and seeing it return in a few hours. Learning the names of butterflies massed on *Buddleia* flowers; identifying the pile of moth wings lying beneath a place where a bat hung to feed; tanks of freshwater fish and tropical guppies in the lab; learning bird song, the intricacies of the life cycle of ferns, and watching *Paramecium* and *Vorticella* through a microscope. A wonderful introduction to the natural world given by a truly inspirational teacher.

Then, in 1948, he took a group of us on a fortnight's expedition to the newly re-opened Bird Observatory on Skokholm Island off the Pembrokeshire coast. What an adventure! The longest train journey I had ever made, then the sea crossing in a small boat. As it happened the weather was wonderful and we went straight on out for 20 miles into the Atlantic to Grassholm Island and its gannetry. As a 14 year old I was soon hopping out of a small boat surging up and down in the Atlantic swell on to rocks and climbing the cliff to view the colony of 6000 pairs of gannets! Returning to Skokholm we were out early next day and in the wonderful days that followed recording plants, lichens and seaweeds on transect lines running from

low tide marks to cliff tops; experiencing the amazing nocturnal noise of the huge Manx Shearwater colony; and seeing a Storm Petrel and Ravens for the first time. To add even more we recorded migrating butterflies and there was a mass migration of Willow Warblers. We caught and ringed 254 in one day by working the Heligoland traps – a record at the time – and then went out the same night to catch and ring 100 Manx Shearwaters.

I could go on with the next instalment of a naturalist's life after 14 years of age but in writing these words after so many years it becomes clear to me how, when, and why I became an obsessional amateur naturalist, bird ringer and wildlife conservationist. The obsession still burns brightly as I enter my 80th year.



Early days with a butterfly net - Harry Green



Harry Green digging out a defunct wasps nest under instructions from Arnold Darlington. Nearly defunct anyway as I remember getting stung on both knees! Many years later I was amazed to see the picture in his small book "The ecology of refuse tips" published in 1969 over 20 years after the photo was taken.



Harry Green with Brett Westwood, Ian Wallace and David Pryce recording male and female adult Land Caddis, Chaddersley Woods, 15 October 2005.



Harry exploring a veteran tree! Witley Court, 30 January 2004

Rosemary Winnall

Black Grouse in Wyre

CONTRIBUTED BY PAUL READE

From: The Zoologist: a Monthly Journal of Natural History Fourth Series - Vol. XV Editor: W. L. Distant, London 1911.

Former Occurrence of Black Grouse in Wyre Forest, Shropshire, and Worcestershire.

In 'Berrow's Worcester Journal', August 14th, 1817, appears an advertisement of property for sale, of which the following is an extract: - "Upwards 1100 acres of land, Brand Wood, Wimper Hill, Lower Longdon, Upper Longdon, Withy Bed and Great Chamberlaine. All in the parish of Stottesdon, generally known as Vallet Woods, Bewdley Forest. Abounding with Grouse and

Pheasants." From these particulars we can gather that Black Grouse were at least fairly abundant in that particular part of Wyre Forest. When I first visited this district in 1888 I found Black Game still here, but evidently in very reduced numbers to those of former times. I should think their numbers would not have exceeded a score of birds altogether, and these verged rapidly on extinction. The last notes I have of Black Grouse being seen were a greyhen on June 10th, 1893, flushed on the Shropshire portion, and a male bird March 11th, 1894, on the Worcestershire part of the Forest, both not far distant from Dowles Brook. J. Steele Elliot (Dowles Manor, Salop).