

## Online Talks December 2020 and January 2021

Reports by Alison Uren and Christine Seymour

### **Heading for Extinction, and what to do about it, by Johnny Birks, ecologist and mammal expert**

Johnny Birks and Isabel Jones are committed supporters of Extinction Rebellion and this talk was an explanation of their standpoint and policy.

We are sleepwalking into the most awful crisis. Sadly, the dice is loaded against us because we live in a system that doesn't value or protect the world we live in. If you think Covid-19 is disruptive, wait until you see what global heating has in store. Skyrocketing CO2 concentration causes temperature rises and, as things are, we are heading for a rise of three to four degrees by the end of this century. Already we are seeing more drought conditions, storms and wildfires in many parts of the world. Ice caps are melting and sea levels are rising. There will be an increase in conflicts and mass displacement of populations and the rate of species extinction is accelerating. When the problem reaches a "tipping point" the effects are unpredictable and irreversible.

XR is making three demands to address the above. They want governments and scientists to tell the truth. They want a globally legally binding target for net zero carbon emissions by 2025 (not 2050, which is too late). They support the idea of a Citizens' Assembly to decide how to achieve this.

### **Pine Martens, by Lizzie Croose, Senior Carnivore Conservation Officer with the Vincent Wildlife Trust**

Pine martens are the rarest of our six native mustelids. Their natural habitat is forests; they live and breed in trees. They are mainly nocturnal and a predator of small mammals like voles, although also omnivorous. After the last Ice Age, they were widespread across Britain but by 1915 were decimated by hunting, predator control and loss of habitat. Small populations remained in the NW Highlands, Lake District and North Wales. By the 1930s there was some natural recovery in Scotland but not in England or Wales. The Vincent Wildlife Trust aims to reverse this decline; since 2014 they have run pine marten recovery programmes. The first reintroductions were to forests near Aberystwyth in Ceredigion. 51 martens were trapped in the Scottish Highlands and relocated to Wales. Careful monitoring has shown that this has been a great success with 38 kits born and expansion of the martens' range both north and south along the Cambrian mountains. In 2016 a successful reintroduction programme started in the Forest of Dean, with 18 individuals introduced and another 21 arriving in 2021. At least three of the females are breeding. In northern England, a partnership project 'Back from the Brink' is helping to increase the numbers there.

Each project requires careful preparation: feasibility studies, community and stakeholder involvement, with monitoring by volunteers playing a big part in the success. There is evidence from Ireland that pine martens predate grey squirrels rather than reds and, if so, this would be a great benefit to habitat and species recovery.

Lizzie's talk was full of fascinating detail with exciting video footage of these elusive creatures. Could we see them in Herefordshire and Worcestershire? To find out more visit the Vincent Wildlife Trust website at [www.vwt.org.uk](http://www.vwt.org.uk).

### **Urban Peregrines, by Ed Drewitt, naturalist, broadcaster and wildlife guide**

With flight speeds of up to 200 mph, large eyes that can see at night and deadly talons, the peregrine (*Falco peregrinus* – the wanderer) is one of the most exciting raptors in the UK. In the 1960s their numbers fell to 385 pairs due to the use of pesticides that weakened their eggshells. Since the banning of DDT they have bounced back to 1769 pairs in 2014. They are increasing in England, Wales and lowland Scotland, although still declining in Northern Scotland, thought to be due to persecution and lack of prey.

When Ed first began studying and ringing peregrines 22 years ago they were confined mainly to coastal areas but now are increasingly found in urban areas and present in most towns and cities. They breed on buildings such as cathedrals and office blocks and are helped along by nest boxes. Use of webcams on nests has allowed family groups to be followed and has given the public close views of these spectacular birds. First year males sometimes become 'helper' birds to their parents – a recent startling discovery. During the day, urban peregrines take common birds like pigeons, starlings and ring-necked parakeets but during the night they hunt migratory species that are flying overhead. Analysis of feathers has found an astonishing range of birds such as woodcock, ducks, golden plover, redwings and even curlew.

### **Wild Boar in the Forest of Dean, by John Dutton, Senior Lecturer at the University of Worcester**

Wild Boar are a somewhat controversial issue in the Forest of Dean – some love them and some hate them! After becoming extinct in this country 700 years ago, wild boar have recently appeared in several places around the UK. Some were escapees from wild boar farms, some were illegal boar "dumps" and some were liberations by animal activists. It is estimated there are around 1200 in the Forest of Dean now, with some being culled every year.

John Dutton talked about their ecology and behaviour as well as their social structure – usually in sounders of up to 40 related females with their young, and solitary adult males. He described and illustrated the field signs of rooting, excavations, footprints, wallows and rubbing trees. He discussed their potential ecological impacts. Rooting disturbance is often seen as "damage" but there is evidence that there are positive effects as well, like regeneration of species especially wetland flora and the breaking up of swards of bracken. Seed dispersal is another important role. Overall his conclusion was that wild boar are good for the ecology and a vital missing part of the woodland ecosystem.

## Contributions

Please send any ideas or contributions for future Newsletters to the editor Christine Seymour  
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# Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

Spring 2021

## Malvern Group

[www.malverngroup.btck.co.uk](http://www.malverngroup.btck.co.uk)  
[malverngroup@live.co.uk](mailto:malverngroup@live.co.uk)

### Welcome to the Malvern Group

Alison Uren (Chairman)

Sadly, this will be my last newsletter for the Malvern Group! As most of you know, my husband and I have moved to Somerset to be nearer our children and grandchildren. I have really enjoyed my association with the Malvern Group and with Worcestershire Wildlife Trust as a whole. It is very rewarding indeed to feel that one has contributed to the enjoyment and education of our members, as well as fund-raising and helping the team at Smite with the conservation of all the wonderful nature reserves in Worcestershire.

Christine Seymour will be the new editor of the newsletter and other members of the committee are taking on new roles as well as continuing previous tasks. Margaret Vernon will be Acting Chairman from May onwards, for up to a year. **However, the committee is soon going to need more help and we would be very grateful indeed if you have some time and enthusiasm.** Please get in touch with Margaret (565079) if you feel you could do this, even if only in a small way.

Indoor meetings will not be happening for a while yet, though there is hope that they might start up again in September. In the meantime, the fortnightly online talks are excellent; there are reports of four recent ones overleaf. Forthcoming talks are advertised on the main WWT website.

### Outdoor Events 2021

As we went to press, the Government had just announced our roadmap out of Covid. We are looking at rescheduling our April day trips (to the Great Bustard Project and Moccas Park) and are talking to the accommodation owner regarding our trips to Mull in May. We are getting in touch with anyone is booked onto any of these trips.

In the meantime, if you are interested in joining any of our trips when they are rescheduled, please ring Margaret Vernon on 01684 565079.

Fingers crossed that all goes well for the rest of this year. With any luck, it looks like our trip to The Knepp may well be able to go ahead as planned...

**The Knepp, West Sussex** plus visits to reserves on the outward and return journeys and whilst in the area.

Sunday 4th July – Wednesday 7th July: now a three-night trip (4 days)

Estimated cost: £130 per person sharing; £190 single. This includes all transport and rooms at the Premier Inn. No meals are included.

The Knepp Estate with its rewilding ethos has had plenty of media cover as has Isabella Tree's book 'Wilding', which describes the project (see their website for more details). Our visit should be the optimum time for flora and fauna, including the rare purple emperor butterfly. We will be exploring some of the 16 miles of footpaths. Please note the ground may be rough and uneven.

Local guided walks will be arranged when it is possible to do so and you will be kept informed. **Make sure you are on our email list: send address to [malverngroup@live.co.uk](mailto:malverngroup@live.co.uk)**

### The Knapp & Papermill Reserve Work Parties

Brian Iles



The Knapp and Papermill work parties consist of some very dedicated and hard-working people. In the early autumn we were just starting to catch up with the jobs left over from the first lockdown period in spring 2020. Due to the current Covid restrictions we have had to stop again and the outstanding jobs have now been exacerbated by the recent flood damage. Trees have been felled at the water's edge, some of which are now trapped against Pivany Bridge. Several fences have been broken down by flotsam and part of the path through the orchard has been washed away. Some large, stacked logs that were in Nightingale Bower are now lying in the orchard, having been washed down the Leigh Brook and over the weir. At the time of writing we are expecting more floods, which may result in more damage.

We normally work until the end of May; hopefully, we will get a chance to restart our work parties before then.