



Stories from the wild: an introduction to creative nature writing

Start date Saturday 17 September **Time** 10.00am – 4.45pm

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge

Tutor Derek Niemann **Course code** 1617NDX018

Director of Programmes Emma Jennings

For further information on this course, please contact Public Programme Co-ordinator, Clare Kerr
clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk or 01223 746237

To book See: www.ice.cam.ac.uk or telephone 01223 746262

Tutor biography

Derek Niemann is a freelance writer and editor specialising in natural history. His third non-fiction book *A Tale of Trees: The battle to save Britain's ancient woodland* will be published in October 2016 (Short Books). Derek's two previous titles were *Birds in a Cage* (Short Books, 2011), a true story about Prisoner of War birdwatchers in World War II, and *A Nazi in the Family* (Short Books, 2015), based on the SS grandfather he never knew. He is a country diary columnist for the Guardian and also writes for BBC Wildlife. Formerly he was children's magazines editor for the RSPB (1998-2014) and wrote a number of books for children.

Course programme

9:30	Terrace bar open for pre-course tea/ coffee
10.00 – 11:15	Session 1 The nature writer's art – looking at a range of writers and approaches to interpreting nature. Where does the writer find their voice?
11.15	Coffee
11:45 – 13:00	Session 2 Taking our senses for a walk. An outdoor session in the grounds where we use all our senses to find new ways to engage with the natural world. (Please ensure you bring comfortable and suitable outdoor clothing and footwear)
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 15:15	Session 3 Go wild with words. Participants use their experience gleaned from the morning walk to begin writing their own 'country diary'.
15:15	Tea
15:30 – 16:45	Session 4 Rounding up. We share our experiences and writing to see how we have captured the essence of nature at Madingley
16:45	Day school ends

Course syllabus

Aims:

This course can serve as a gentle introduction to nature writing, or a chance to look at fresh approaches to the craft for more experienced writers. It is intended to stimulate observational skills and creative written communication.

Content:

This course will use a mixture of theory and practice. We will begin by examining themes, techniques and styles used by a range of UK nature writers, with a particular emphasis on contemporary writing, in an attempt to answer the question – what makes a good story from the wild? What separates sublime writing from the ‘feather-footed through the plashy fen passes the questing vole’ prose lampooned by Evelyn Waugh?

In considering strengths and weaknesses, we will help build a foundation of ideas and approaches for a practical session in which we slip outdoors into the beautiful, stimulating grounds of Madingley Hall (weather permitting) to find source material for our own wild writing.

Course participants will be encouraged to be a country diarist for the day, capturing impressions from their personal experiences, trying their hand at producing a short piece of creative nature writing, then sharing their work with fellow students in a light-hearted, mutually-supportive round-up session.

Presentation of the course:

The course teaching will involve class discussion, practical writing exercises, and a field visit (in the grounds - please ensure you bring comfortable and suitable outdoor clothing and footwear). There will also be tailor-made written material for participants to take away afterwards.

Outcomes:

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

- Make more informed critical judgements about nature writing, equipped with more tools for evaluation.
- Be stimulated to think about how personal observations of wildlife can be captured creatively.
- Feel more confident about writing creatively about nature, whether for publication or for private pleasure.

Reading and resources list

Listed below are a number of texts that might be of interest for future reference, but do not need to be bought (or consulted) for the course.

Author	Title	Publisher and date
Cocker, Mark	<i>Crow country</i>	Jonathan Cape 2007
Fortey, Richard	<i>The Wood for the trees</i>	William Collins 2016
Jamie, Kathleen	<i>Findings</i>	Sort of Books 2005
Liptrot, Amy	<i>The Outrun</i>	Canongate 2016
Mabey, Richard	<i>A brush with nature: reflections on the natural world</i>	BBC 2014
Macdonald, Helen	<i>H is for Hawk</i>	Jonathan Cape 2014
White, Gilbert	<i>The natural history of Selborne</i>	Various 1795

Website addresses

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/series/country-diary>

It would be helpful if students read a range of authors and entries from this daily column before coming on the course.

Additional information

Venue

Details of how to find Madingley Hall can be found on our website:

<http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk/who-we-are/how-to-find-the-institute>

Refreshments

Tea and coffee and lunch will be provided. If you have any specific dietary requirements or allergies and have not already advised us, please inform our Admissions Team on

ice.admissions@ice.cam.ac.uk or +44 (0)1223 746262.

Note Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

Information correct as of: 22 August 2016