

Institute of Continuing Education

# A wild weekend: creative nature writing

Start date 13th July 2018 End date 15th July 2018

**Venue** Madingley Hall

Madingley Cambridge

Tutor Derek Niemann Course code 1718NRX068

Interim Co-Directors of Public and Professional Programmes

Dr Liz Morfoot
Dr Tom Monie

For further information on this course, please contact

Public Programme Coordinator, Clare Kerr clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk or 01223 746237

**To book** See: <u>www.ice.cam.ac.uk</u> or telephone 01223 746262

### **Tutor biography**

**Derek Niemann** is a freelance writer and editor specialising in natural history. His most recent nonfiction book *A Tale of Trees: The battle to save Britain's ancient woodland* was 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*, edits the magazine of the Small Woods Association, and is a feature writer for BBC Wildlife. Formerly he was children's magazines editor for the RSPB (1998-2014) and has written a number of wildlife books for children.

# Course programme

## **Friday**

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00	Dinner	
20:30 – 22:00	A log and a nature table – discovering wonders in the ordinary.	
22:00	Terrace bar open for informal discussion	
Saturday		
07:30	Breakfast	
09:00 - 10:30	<b>Finding your natural voice</b> – how we can learn from writers past and present.	
10:30	Coffee	
11:00 – 12:30	<b>Woods, water, wild flowers</b> – an outdoor session to inspire everyone to have a go at writing their own country diary.	
13:00	Lunch	
14:00 – 16:00	Free	
16:00	Tea	
16:30 – 18:00	<b>Animal sense</b> – some of our senses are under-used. Can you boost your writing by honing your animal instincts?	
18:00 – 18:30	Free	
18:30	Dinner	
20:00 – 21:30	An owl's supper and a night adventure – we'll be dissecting owl pellets before going on a group exploration of the grounds after dark.	
21:30	Terrace bar open for informal discussion	
Sunday		
07:30	Breakfast	
09:00 – 10:30	<b>Literary devices</b> – the practicalities of enhancing your natural powers of description.	
10:30	Coffee	

11:00 - 12:30 **Round up and review** 

12:45 Lunch

The course will disperse after lunch

#### 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 examine themes, techniques and styles used by a range of 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 practical sessions in which we find out what an owl had for dinner, and 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 capture impressions from their personal experiences, heightening their senses. They'll be trying their hand at producing creative nature writing, then sharing their work with fellow students in light-hearted, mutually-supportive sessions.

#### Presentation of the course:

The course teaching will involve class discussion, practical writing exercises, practical natural history exercises, and field visits (in the grounds). There will also be tailor-made written material for participants to take away afterwards.

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

- Develop a greater understanding of the variety of approaches to creative nature writing. They
  will be able to make better-informed critical assessments of a whole range of texts,
  evaluating aspects such as the authorial voice and stylistic devices.
- Analyse different kinds of nature writing, discuss views and work together in team sessions and in open fora. They will come away from the day with a keener appreciation of wildlife.
- Develop an extra awareness of nature, based on their senses, and to communicate their findings in words. They will gain self-confidence from personal discoveries and shared understanding.

# 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
Jamie, Kathleen	Findings	(London: Sort of Books, (2005)
Liptrot, Amy	The Outrun	(London: Canongate, 2016)
Lewis-Stempel, John	Meadowland	(London: Doubleday, (2014)
Hoare, Philip	Leviathan	(London: Fourth Estate, 2008)
Cocker, Mark	Crow country	(London: Jonathan Cape, 2007)

**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: 01 May 2018