



Stories from the wild: an introduction to creative nature writing

Start date	27 th May 2018	Time	10:00 – 16:45
Venue	Madingley Hall Madingley Cambridge		
Tutor	Derek Niemann	Course code	1718DX033

Interim Co-Directors of Public and Professional Programmes Dr Liz Morfoot
Dr Tom Monie

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 most recent non-fiction 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 wrote a number of wildlife books for children.

Course programme

9:30	Terrace bar open for pre-course tea/ coffee
10.00 – 11:15	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	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.
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 15:15	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	Rounding up. We share our experiences and writing to see how we have captured the essence of nature at Madingley, and follow up with tips for the future.
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). There will also be tailor-made written material for participants to take away afterwards.

Outcomes:

- Students will 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.
- In team sessions and in open fora, students will be encouraged to analyse different kinds of nature writing, discuss views and work together. They will come away from the day with a keener appreciation of wildlife.
- Students will be encouraged to 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.

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 texts that might be of interest should you wish to supplement your learning on the course. Any essential reading is marked with an asterisk *

Author	Title	Publication
Kathleen Jamie	<i>Findings</i>	Sort of Books (2005)
Amy Liptrot	<i>The Outrun</i>	Canongate (2016)
John Lewis-Stempel	<i>Meadowland</i>	Doubleday (2014)
Philip Hoare	<i>Leviathan</i>	Fourth Estate (2008)
Mark Cocker	<i>Crow country</i>	Jonathan Cape (2007)

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.

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