



Eycott Hill: The Meadow and the Mire

A third collection of writing
inspired by Eycott Hill Nature Reserve

Edited by Nichola Jackson and Geraldine Green



Cumbria
Wildlife Trust



Protecting **Wildlife** for the Future



Eycott Hill Nature Reserve is a fantastic place, overlooked by the mighty peaks of Blencathra and the northern fells, and nationally important for both its geology and wetland habitats.

Cumbria Wildlife Trust purchased Eycott Hill in April 2015 and a project to make it even better for wildlife and people began thanks to funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Flower-rich meadows, hedgerows and areas of woodland have been planted, and work undertaken to block artificial drainage channels and create areas of upland scrub heath. Insects, birds and mammals have benefited from this intricate mosaic of habitats and a diverse range of species will continue to make the nature reserve their home.

In celebration of the nature reserve people have been taking part in lots of events and responding in creative ways. This fabulous collection of writing is a result of a creative writing online workshop that took place in August 2020 led by local poet and creative writing tutor Geraldine Green.

This is the third collection inspired by Eycott Hill Nature Reserve; The Raspberry & the Rowan and An Aikett Wind are available from Cumbria Wildlife Trust website.

We hope you enjoy the anthology and if you feel inspired to visit and write something of your own we'd love to see it.

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Anthology title inspired by Caroline Gilfillan's poem Eycott Hill Meadow and Mire.



Mother Willow

Oh, Mother Willow.
I sit at your feet,
Wrapping my arms around your trunk,
As you wrap your vines around me.

Oh, Mother Willow.
How long have you been here?
How many others have come before I,
To bask in your splendour?

Oh, Mother Willow.
How many storms have you weathered?
Can you teach me your strength?
Will you give me your courage?
Could you show me your ways?

Oh, Mother Willow.
You have been here long before I,
And shall remain long after I have gone.
Will you remember me, as I you?

Oh, Mother Willow.
Although we shall part,
Now I know where you stand,
We can meet again.

Please, don't move, just wait.

Brontë Dines-Allen

Eycott Hill Meadow and Mire

Don't think the mire is clothed in grass. She's dressed in older, tougher cloth, woven of sedges and heath patched together by sphagnum moss. In her spongy pools golden-ringed and four-spotted chaser dragonflies breed and spar for territory above the boggy sludge. Jewel-eyed deer flies hatch and buzz, thirsty for mammal blood, eager to torment the Belted Galloways in their natty overcoats.



Close by, the moth-eaten meadow, exhausted by decades of intensive farming has been stripped and dressed in a blanket of seedy-rich hay. Now we wait for melancholy thistle, yellow rattle, eyebright and hawkbit to embroider the grasses with their blossoms.



Some time ago
I walked this landscape beside a woman searching for solitary bees, and as we talked I learned that being a honey bee, industrious among thousands in a hive dripping with sweetness, is just one way a bee can live. There are many ways to thrive, I thought. Like the meadow and the mire.

Caroline Gilfillan



The Rowan Tree is...

a climber that clings
to the edge
of the wind torn scar
roots driven into fissures

scent of the mountain
from milk-tinged blossom
spread by eagle feather leaves
ambrosia filled gullies

Norse woman spreading
shelter on heat-heavy days
for sheep before shearing
symbol of protection

fire in berries of blood
as nights draw close
smoke risen from the valley
like a homecoming

stark when winter's
bone-white stencils a skeleton
on a canvas of rock
after curlew and kestrel have left

Kathleen Swann

No Small Thing

Doesn't it all come down to this?

The last snow melting as Lenten lilies

shrug off their paper cases;

sunlight spreading like butter

in Eycott's dips and folds?

Everything comes full circle.

Last night's rain swelling this morning's beck,

saplings striking where oak woods stood.

Barbara Hickson



Heron

sun is strong wind strong
sky blue from edge to edge

stand of poplar stresses in heat
golden-dry shambles crackles underfoot

bees amok in mint-scented air
small lake lip-laps at muddy ripples

outrageous squawk and heron
lifts into shadow flight

broad Vlad flap with impaling beak
lands in a span of stubbled field

evolutionary argument for pterodactyl stasis
isolate statue eying the competition

cellphone lens clicks time into place
and again the earthed bird is airborne

riding heavy scouring folds
of hilltop plains water bound

Elaine Briggs



Riverlight, Childlight

lights reflecting off wavelets
refracting on the sandy bed

prickling like tiny electric eels
faraway worlds here at her feet

irresistible step into their midst
beams of heat playing with toes

hands plunge in the cold river
to catch the fleeing sun

Elaine Briggs

She is a Wildflower

You can find her in a meadow,
You can find her in a park,
You can find her on a mountain,
And, if you're lucky, you can find her in the dark.

She is in amongst the bushes,
Deep within the grass,
Hiding near a willow tree,
Or within a looking glass.

In summer she is smiling;
Her beauty for all to see.
You will find you have gone breathless,
As you take in her splendour with glee.

By autumn her smile has faded,
Just like the sun in the sky.
Her colour is no longer vibrant
And her skin has gone quite dry.

Don't look for her in winter,
For she will be covered in snow.
Her beauty will still be there
But she cannot put it on show.

When you find her in spring,
Please just leave her be,
As she is a wildflower;
And she must always be free.

Brontë Dines-Allen





Carpe Diem

Short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*)

She will not wait for shadows,
the night's dark cover
to disguise her fitful flight.

The light is hers; each day a chance
to scour the heath and hollows,
snatch what she can.

When she quarters grassland
pipits lift, scatter like leaves in a storm.
Voles scuttle, evade the scorch
of yellow eyes that scrutinise
minute movement, interrogate
each rustle through sedge.

Why wait for the moon?
Fur purses litter the ground,
boast the remains of her day's takings.

Barbara Hickson

Hawthorn

I knew you in spring
admired the sinews of your trunk
the hard, bright bark, the twists
and turns of you.

Knew you later, when the greening began
and you swam in the air like a swallow
your limbs leafed and leafing
your boughs beginning

to dress in blossom; the white of you,
the clean, bright scent of aniseed
sailing into the blue to mingle
with larksong tremble

that sends a tingle through me as I
walk into it. If I breathe in your notes
that fall on me, breathe in



the morning enchantment, will I become
the song of the lark on the common?
If I stand quite still will the arms
of this hawthorn pull me to you?

I knew you in autumn, your berries bright
on the common, knew you in winter when
the winds blow down from high fells
when sheep and humans huddle

swallows long gone, the larks' songs
waiting in the wings to be born
to hover over limbs of thorn, drop
notes onto coconut gorse that line

the lane that leads to this point
where I ache to become the Bay's
dazzle in winter-grey or summer-light

Geraldine Green



Forest Ride

The forest ride makes a couple of turns
downhill to an outcome sealed in leaf and mystery.

Closer, butterflies vie over heads of knapweed,
asphodel runs to seed, and here

pine bark is lifting off trunks, crusting keratoses
slumped into a mess of twigs and grass,

those lower voices unheard in undergrowth. Far and near
are nothing to pine winds that bemoan no home.

Elaine Briggs

The Call

Glimpsed through tangled twigs and leaves
the lake is still as this May afternoon

I weave a path through silken grasses
bog cotton and red campion, pause
mid-stride to watch a bee
settle, thrum of wings

brindled body bobbing
then I hear it

at first muffled then nearer, clear
cuckoo's voice
opens a path through boughs *
to land in my ears.

**From Birdcall by Alice Ostriker*

Maggie Scott





Eycott Lava

this stone sucks the seep of rain
from endless skies of melting cloud
a restful moor of grass and bees
in company of butterflies
songs of curlew and raven

guardian of history beyond our knowing
risen in caverns of molten earth
hurled by magma into icy air
settled in this volcanic cradle
of sharp edged mountains

secrets of Saxons Romans Vikings
lie sleeping in your layers
footprints meld in sandstone sills
walk the silent ways
to remind us we too will leave

Kathleen Swann



Special Secret

out of the back yard
along the cinder track
undo the lock

through the farm gate
up and out
on to the hills

sour smell suddenly
steals the air
shiny flies buzz on cowpats

they walk in silence
the grandfather's words
go a long way

hard to keep up with them
they're very tall and gaunt
with long striding legs

they name things
the child doesn't know
hart's tongue, harebell, whitethorn

man and child are on their way
to the boggy dip
the man knows

so the child can learn
the plant that eats insects
sundew, flytrap

it's weird, the child's unsure
but doesn't say

the plant's sticky fronded mouth
is a gain with some part lost

and the child must never tell
the special place

it's a secret
the grandfather's and the child's

Elaine Briggs

Horse Chestnut Tree

The horse chestnut tree spreads like a plump uncle's backside over the garden of the house on the roundabout. Each autumn conkers thud on to the lawn, protected by their green, soft-spiked armour.

In scratchy school uniform and knee-socks
I climb over the low wall and fill my pockets.
My brothers – the Castor and Pollux of swagger –
scoop them up, too, thread them with string
and battle hell for leather in their shared bedroom.
Me? I like the red-brown sheen, the sappy damp
that clings to them as they're eased out of their beds.
I even admire their pale tonsure – a modest splurge –
an apology, almost for their slow shrivel on the shelf.

Caroline Gilfillan



I will be there

Even when the rains fall,
I will be there when the mountains call.

Even when the snow settles,
I will be in my wellies among the nettles.

Even when the ice freezes,
I will be amid the wildflowers battling my sneezes.

Even when the sun beams,
I will be in my sunscreen paddling in the streams.

No matter the weather,
I will be climbing that hill so we can be together.

Brontë Dines-Allen



Birdsfoot Trefoil

Minute in your lakeside camp
of rough dry grass,
I can barely make you out.

Imagination makes up
what the failing eyes
and the ramrod backbone

cannot grasp. That blur
of yellow, I think, divides
into swollen claws tipped

with orange fire, spurring out
from plain clover-like leaves.
Thus, a brief account of you.

Because the wonder of knowing,
carnally as it were, getting under
the whys and wherefores of

your vanilla scent, is superseded
by faint memories of you,
and bluebell, pimpernel, speedwell,

days when you gemmed small worlds
of childish delights, long days when
essence of pebble would hold a hand.

Elaine Briggs





Pebbles

I walk on Whitby beach
watching pebbles pushed by waves
returned to rest as swell recedes
their colours diverse as summer hedgerows
honey yellow, grey like clouds before rain
crimson as late evening sunsets
and a kind of mottled green
borrowed from seaweed.

I stoop to gather a few
my fingers hover, nearly pick
a speckled one, reminds me of an egg
I choose instead, one purist black
darker than no moon night
holding it in the heart of my hand
I listen to its wisdom. How being
silent and still can teach so much.

Maggie Scott

Badger

I am always watching*
waiting for that opportunity
to leave the comfort of my set
and forage in the foliage.

I am always watching
turning my head from left to right
as I scour the night sky
predators lurk in the undergrowth,
I can't be sure if I will be safe.

I am always watching
my family sat behind me
their noses twitching
their eyes firmly shut.

I am always watching
for movement in the long grass.
I hear scurrying and scratching
a flash of movement.

I am always watching
as the darkness begins to fade
I know morning is coming.
Retreating to the set
I know I will be safe.

**From Heron by Linda Hogan*

Nichola Jackson



Urban Wildlife in the Time of Covid

All photos in this piece taken by © Rachel Wegh

I watch and listen from my balcony in the backstreets of Waterloo, London. West facing, it attracts the sun from noon until dusk. I can see the London eye through the tops of trees and the almost im-perceptible movement of its carriages in normal time. But things are far from normal. The Corona-virus pandemic has driven people to their homes and the cars off the streets. The London Eye car-riages stand motionless. The trains I usually hear, screeching and grinding on tracks, have become silent. But new sounds, previously unheard to me over the city din, can be singled out in this en-clave of houses and flats.

It's early morning in late March and I hear a wren sing. Unmistakable, loud and surprisingly hearty for something so small. The buildings seem to huddle and amplify its high pitched, thrilling trilling song. I see a young fledgling, clinging to the crumbling grout between the bricks. A cat prowls be-neath. The parent bird must be nearby but at the moment is no-where to be seen. I stand with my mug of tea and watch the unfolding drama. Then the parent bird swoops down and guides the youngster up towards the safety of a tree. I was lost for a moment in the spectacle, out and away from my own anxious thoughts. This small sighting of nature gives so much pleasure.





I'm reminded of a springtime passed. I'd heard a thud on my open glass balcony door. A wren had flown into it. I pick it up, but it dies in that instant. I'm gutted but think that's the last of it. Then, a week later it occurs again. This time the wren doesn't die but lies in the palm of my hand, it's little heart beating fast, eyes wide. I gently stroke it and it settles, content to stay there and close its eye. Then a lorry hurtles down the side road next to my building and frightens it into action. It flies off in the direction it had been headed. I am left with the memory of this tiny but significant encounter. I came to learn that I'd impinged on the wren family flight path. Since then, I put a towel over the glass panel every time the door is left open, to warn of an obstacle.

A blue-tit lands on the stump of a birch tree next door. I have my camera and a long lens sitting on the balcony table in front of me. I pick it up gently and take a few shots of it, grub in mouth, before it disappears under the eaves to feed its young.

It's been suggested that wildlife are taking advantage of quiet urban areas during Covid. Coming out into the open, like the goats in Llandudno, that came into the town to feast on hedgerows and flowers. But the food supply of many city creatures such as half eaten chips and sandwich crusts, has not been as plentiful. Humans have also been using their gardens and balconies more. So maybe its just that we've had more time to notice the wildlife that is actually all around us!



In mid-June, I sign up to a Facebook page that the nature presenter Chris Packham has set up. It's called 'The Self-Isolating Bird Club'. It's an attempt to bring peace and pleasure during this pan-demic of fear and unfamiliarity. Sitting at the balcony table, I enjoy looking through posts. Not just of birds, but daily instalments of Vix the vixen who visits Marion's garden every day for 'chompy chicken'; Fluffy the scruffy robin and his daily 'scruff-dates', his feathers in a constant state of dis-array; as well hedgehog sightings and insect behaviours.

Dilly and I study the rooftops for pigeons. I'm reminded of a photo project I did a few years ago. With time to look and appreciate, they became more than the feral fiends we are prone to portray them as. There are feral blue-bar and brown-checkered, rock doves, stock doves and wood pigeons. There is no distinction between pigeons and doves but we tend to welcome the idea of the latter, but not, as a rule, the former. Yet, their ability to 'home' - fly miles to their roosts was invaluable in wartime, as they crossed the channel with messages in tiny bags, saving lives in their thousands. I have come to admire and appreciate them. Dilly just likes to stalk them.

A herring gull lands on the chimney of my flat conversion. Its lilting repetitive screech echoes down into the fireplace and reminds me of seaside trips and the Liverpool docks. Goldfinches have be-come plentiful and their fluid chirruping as they fly past in small groups, makes me smile. Corvids including magpies with their clattering cries, carrion crows and even the occasional jay, teeter down roof tiles and bounce along branches.

Urban Wildlife in the Time of Covid



Throughout August, bees make themselves busy in the lavender growing on my balcony and lemons grow from sweet smelling blossoms that continue to bloom since June.

As the sky begins to darken, I swap my tea mug for a glass of chilled white wine. Pipistrelle bats flit furiously about in ever-expanding circles, as the birdsong begins to cease for the night.

Then at around 3am in the morning, a robin can be heard. They have to compete with traffic in the daytime, so they often sing at night in the city, to attract a mate or make claim to their territories. This adjustment has become habitual, but far less necessary during this time of Covid. Still, they are usually the first up singing in the morning and the last to vacate the song stage at night.

It's September and the traffic is building again. These wildlife sounds and peaceful interactions will soon be obscured. In the meantime, as autumn beckons and the evening light fades as the days shorten, I'm out on my balcony. Watching, listening and enjoying more nature in the city while it lasts.

Rachel Wegh



Biographies:

Elaine Briggs, former University teacher. Having lived in France for fifty years, is now preparing to move back to Cumbria. Loves translation work, reading and writing poetry, plants and gardens, film, is addicted to K Drama.

Brontë Dines-Allen a freelance creative writer, poet and blogger. Inspired by environmentalism, veganism, feminism, politics, mental health awareness, and LGBTQ+ rights.
www.brontedinesallen.co.uk.

Caroline Gilfillan lives in Ulverston, is a poet, novelist and musician who has published four poetry collections. Loves walking, exploring India, playing guitar and watching clouds. Her third murder mystery novel, The Peasmarsh Players, will be published in September 2020.

Geraldine Green poet, tutor, editor, writer-in-residence at the Quaker Tapestry Museum Kendal, is widely anthologised in the UK and America. She has four poetry pamphlets and three full collections published by Indigo Dreams Publishing. In 2011 she gained a PhD in Creative Writing Poetry from Lancaster University.
www.indigodreams.co.uk/geraldine-green-pt/4594309588

Barbara Hickson has an MA in Creative Writing from Manchester Metropolitan University. Her poems have appeared in magazines, anthologies and on-line journals, and been placed and commended in several competitions. She lives in Lancaster with her husband, and is a keen fell-walker and organic gardener.

Nichola Jackson moved to Cumbria over a year ago to work for Cumbria Wildlife Trust on the Eycott Hill project. She enjoys running up and down the fells, swimming in the lakes, cooking, geography and wildlife.

Maggie Scott, ex teacher and psychotherapist. Moved from 'Down South' to Cumbria just over four years ago and is loving it! Enjoys writing poetry, fell-walking, gardening and being in nature.

Kathleen Swann enjoys living in North Yorkshire close to good walking country and with access to wildlife and nature reserves. She belongs to several poetry writing and reading groups. In her spare time she gardens, cooks and supports her local U3A writing group.

Rachel Wegh likes to spend time on her London balcony, observing the wildlife with her cat Dilly. Currently learning memoir to document her experiences, she loves to come up to Cumbria for inspiration and walks to help manage her chronic pain condition. Rachel is finding ways to continue her work with lighter equipment as a fine-art wildlife photographer, film maker and tutor.
www.rachelwegh.com

Photo credits:

- Front cover photo — Nichola Jackson
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- Rowan tree — John Johnston
- Eycott winter wetlands — Nichola Jackson
- Heron — Terry Whittaker/2020vision
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- Conkers — Liz K
- Eycott from Mungrisdale — Jess White
- Birdsfoot trefoil — Lee Schofield
- Whitby beach — Amanda Wade
- Badger — Richard Steel/2020vision
- Dilly on the balcony, blue tit, pigeon, rose and fox — Rachel Wegh
- Back cover photo — Stephen Wilson



Visiting Eycott Hill Nature Reserve

We hope you enjoyed reading the work inspired by Eycott Hill Nature Reserve. If you'd like to visit and experience for yourself the wealth of wildlife it has to offer it is open to the public.

There is free car parking and cycle racks can be found by the entrance to the reserve. There is a waymarked path to the summit of Eycott Hill which follows the driest route. However, it is over uneven and sometimes very wet ground so wellington boots are recommended, particularly after heavy rain.

Please keep dogs on a lead to avoid disturbing the wildlife and grazing animals that are on the reserve all-year round.

Eycott Hill Nature Reserve is near the hamlet of Berrier, just off the A66 between Penrith and Keswick.

Map reference: OS Landranger sheet 90, Explorer Map OL5.	Size: 216 hectares
Grid reference: NY 394 301	Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest
Nearest postcode: CA11 0XD	(111 hectares)

About us

Cumbria Wildlife Trust is the only voluntary organisation devoted solely to the conservation of the wildlife and wild places of Cumbria. The Trust stands up for wildlife, creates wildlife havens, seeks to inspire people, and raises environmental awareness.