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# BIRD STORY

PATRICK CORBETT



Sunbittern feathers

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# EVERYONE HAS A BIRD STORY – HERE'S MINE

- My father and Dorset childhood
- Birds that I and others have come to love
- Bird's eye view of the world today



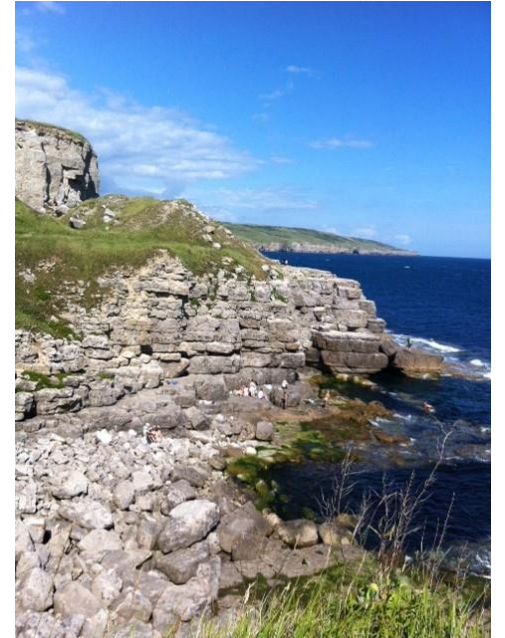
# HE LOVED BIRDS AND GREEN PLACES....

## *Memorial at a Dorset Beach (Winspit)*

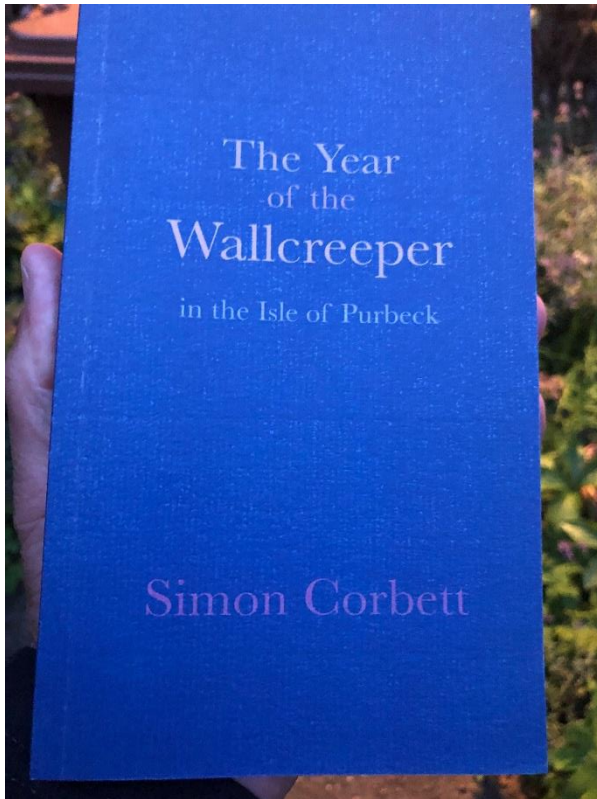
*This moving memorial tells of a death by drowning in the sea nearby. It reads:*

*"In memory of/Alastair/Ian Campbell/Johnstone/drowned at Winspit/ August 19th 1935/He loved birds and/green places and the/wind on the heath/& saw the brightness/of the skirts of God" Born 1917 Died 1935"*

*Also inscribed on the kerb of W.H. Hudson's (a founder of the RSPB) grave in Worthing's Broadwater Cemetery (d. 1922) are the words "**He loved birds and green places and the wind on the heath**, and saw brightness of the skirts of God".*



# WALLCREEPER



There are many websites featuring photographs of birds. One of those that celebrates the huge contribution of amateur birdwatchers to our knowledge of ornithology. A particularly valuable site is [eBird](#). The site claims to be:

*“the world’s largest biodiversity-related citizen science project, with more than 100 million bird sightings contributed each year by eBirders around the world. A collaborative enterprise with hundreds of partner organizations, thousands of regional experts, and hundreds of thousands of users, eBird is managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.”*

“Radiant bird: How far this tiny, lithe,  
And lustrous frame all cosmic hues outshines;  
Thy shafts of sunset, flickering, now scythe  
Their fiery way into cavernous mines  
.....

“Annihilating all that’s made  
To a green thought in a green shade”

*The eBird website has a section of its site dedicated to Wallcreepers. Some of their wonderful pictures of that bird can be seen [here](#).*

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# THE OYSTERCATCHER AND ME

That oystercatcher knew my father

My father knew that oystercatcher.

In fields behind Acorn Lodge they trilled "Twee- wee"

They nest on the shingle roof of Heriot-Watt University

They seem happiest in youthful crowds by the sea

They've always been with me

The oystercatcher's "twee-wee"

Since that Arisaig dawn that I woke to know them first.



Oystercatcher (Sue Macnaughton)

## CARPE DIEM (ROBIN)

An eye - drop of black paint -  
with a dun-green feint,  
nipping in to take reward.  
Chattering to self, heard  
sweet cadences in my ear.  
Trusty garden companion near  
in our cosy space from  
which brave bird takes the worm.

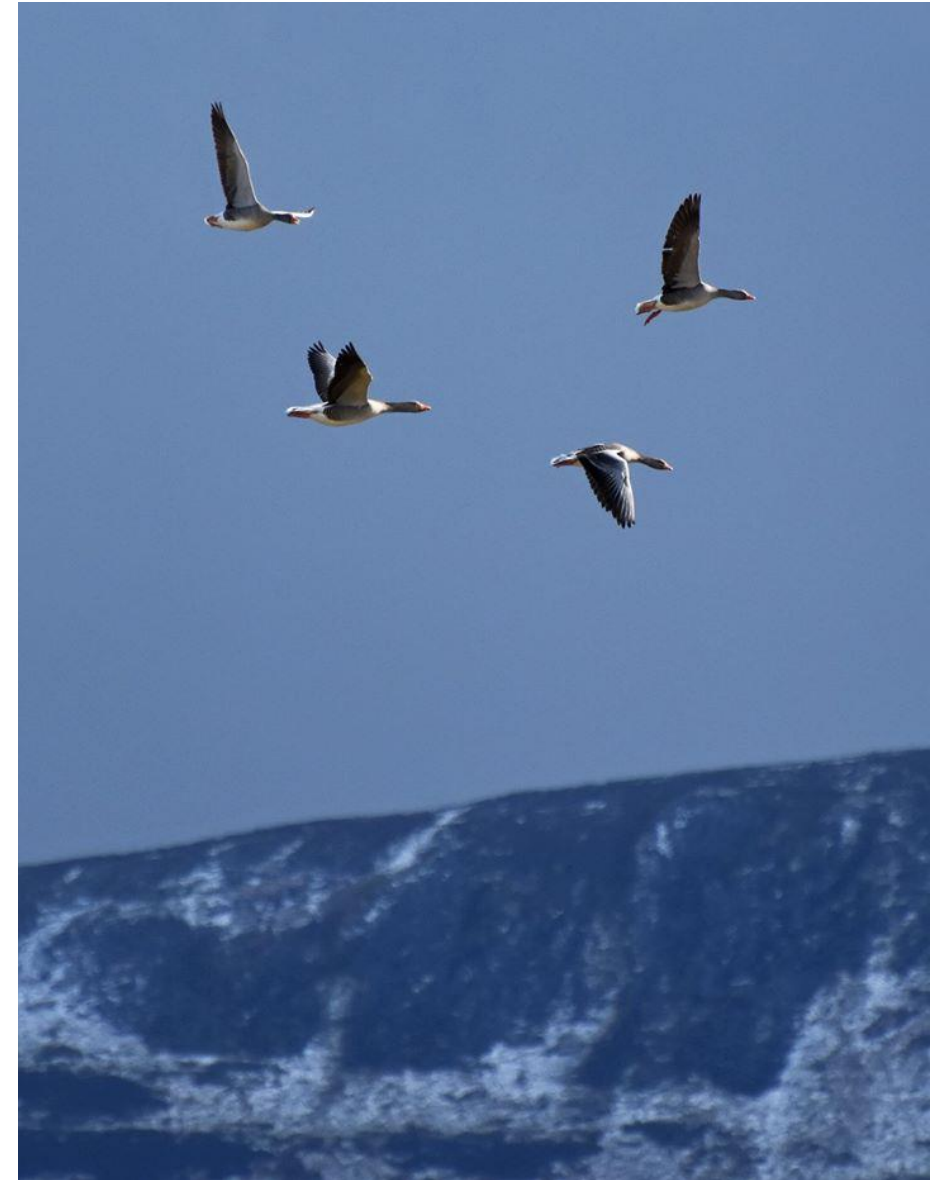


Robin (Sue Macnaughton)

# GEESE ARE BACK

Skins of geese are returning  
Now October is here again  
Where have they been all through  
This long fine summer past?  
What did they see up there in Lapland?  
Did they make new friends or  
Lose their elders on either far journey?  
Scotland's sweet autumn grass and stubble  
Drew them back to strut and own the fields again  
Where all those geese flocked together  
Last winter - though fog and rain and cold  
Away from the snow-covered highlands  
In those lowland Lothian pastures.  
They fly over campus in V-front formations  
Straining to keep up the pace and their place  
In line on the leading Vulcan-wing foreset  
With equal formations above and below, to left and right  
Almost joyous to be back in their winter home  
Their eager gaggling draws your attention  
Up into the sky amongst the gathering clouds

And you smile to yourself - They're back!



Geese over Loch Leven (Sue Macnaughton)

# MAGPIE



Magpie (Source: Heather Smithers - flickr, CC)

## Magpie

(For Ann-Marie)

You hear the cackle  
Look up to see  
A solitary magpie

‘What happened to your mate?’

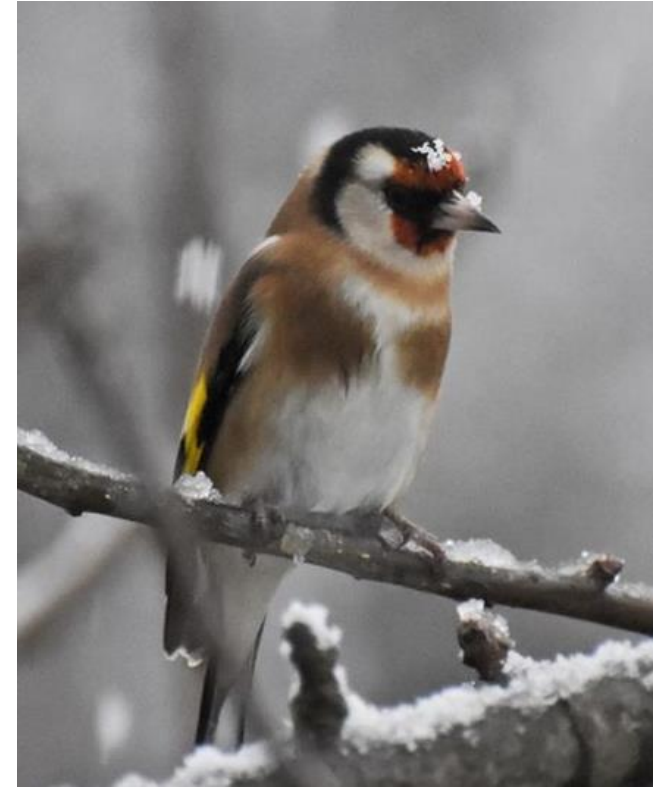
‘It’s nice you should ask,  
They were lost last may’

‘How do you get through the day?’

‘I cackle and watch folk smile’

# WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

- Birds are constant source of delight
- Welcome source of diversity and migration
- The descendants of dinosaurs – and infinitely adaptable
- Internet is an amazing source of photos and music
- Lots of fowls are black – but only one bird
- Birds help us understand our place in the world



Goldfinch (Sue Macnaughton)

*Alice Oswald: “if only the birds had subtitles” (Nobody p8)*

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Sunbittern feathers

The eBird website also has a section dedicated to the [Sunbittern](#) species.