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MAGAZINE



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Nature on display

How eastern art came to western walls

Inspired by nature

The Wainwright Golden Beer Prize, in association with the National Trust, celebrates British nature and travel writing that reflects renowned fellwalker and author Alfred Wainwright's passion for the great British outdoors. We reveal this year's winner and, for fun, asked National Trust book groups around the country to review the shortlist



Love of Country by Madeleine Bunting

Reviewed by the book group at Monk's House, East Sussex

Pursuing a fascination with the outer edges of the British Isles, Madeleine Bunting spent six years travelling to the Hebrides. *Love of Country* is the result. The lyrical opening chapter promises a personal pilgrimage, but the most emotionally engaging elements of the book are the historical and geographical contexts and their relevance today. Through research and investigation, Bunting gets under the skin of the islands and paints a picture of life there. Her descriptions of loss and grief on the islands as people, homes, language and jobs disappeared are vivid and written with a deep sense of injustice. We felt the personal aspect of the book was less successful – the strength of the narrative is in the story of the islands, and we would have liked more of her evocative descriptions of life there.

The Otter's Tale by Simon Cooper

Reviewed by the book group at Flatford, Suffolk

We loved this unique insight into the lives of one of our most secretive mammals, described so beautifully by Simon Cooper. He creates a magical natural world, and his passion for the wildlife and countryside around him makes this a delightful read. We follow otter Kuschta as she emerges into adulthood and raises her own family. Cooper draws us into Kuschta's life and the problems she must overcome to survive. Some of the scenes are quite gruesome or, as some of us said, 'realistic', while fine descriptive passages capture the busyness of the natural world. We felt in reading this book that we learnt a lot not only about Kuschta, her family and nature, but also about the effect that farming behaviours can have on wildlife.



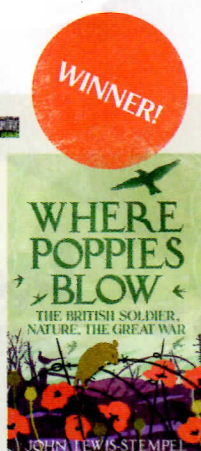
Where Poppies Blow

by John Lewis-Stempel

Reviewed by the book group at Cotehele, Cornwall

Where Poppies Blow brings together history and nature, giving an account of the Great War from a different perspective – the soldiers' connection with nature through the animals and plants around them. The author's agenda comes through strongly – that the British countryside inspired men to fight, and that their

experience of nature and its healing powers helped them keep going. But we felt the number of anecdotes was overwhelming, which meant we couldn't fully engage with the message. It's a passionately written book that gives a voice to soldiers who wrote letters, journals and poetry about their experience of nature. It led to a thought-provoking debate on nature's resilience and the importance of hope in the bleakest of situations.



The
Wainwright
GOLDEN BEER
Book Prize
IN ASSOCIATION WITH National Trust

i The seven shortlisted books are available to buy at shop.nationaltrust.org.uk/mag/wainwright. For more information about the Wainwright Prize visit wainwrightprize.com



The Running Hare

by John Lewis-Stempel

Reviewed by the book group at Castle Ward, County Down

A fourth-generation farmer, John Lewis-Stempel's love of the land and a lifetime involved in farming illuminates his writing in *The Running Hare*. Set in Hertfordshire, it draws deeply on the traditions, practices and language that the English landscape has inspired. In the face of ongoing losses caused by intensive farming practices, Lewis-Stempel takes the reader on a year's journey of restoring an ordinary arable field to a place that not only yields a crop, but also respects the natural world within it. His language moves swiftly from spiritual to theatrical, earthy to magical. As readers we could share the dilemmas of his task, as well as his wonder and delight as what seemed lost – the hares and starlings – return. The author clearly demonstrates the rewards of a thoughtful approach to farming.

Wild Kingdom

by Stephen Moss

Reviewed by the book group at Fountains Abbey, North Yorkshire

Wild Kingdom delivers a clear warning – that the damage to various wildlife habitats has brought about the destruction of many of our native species. But all is not lost – Moss also reports some success stories and suggestions for ways in which we may recover and bring back Britain's wildlife. The author's intention in penning this book – to raise awareness of the plight of the many species in decline – is laudable. The book is also full of charming descriptions, for example of otters and bittern. However, as a group from a rural community, we didn't feel that it always presented balanced arguments or fairly considered the true position of the farmers. While the state of wildlife is an important issue, we felt there was more to say about the restrictions on farmers and essential management of the land.

The January Man

by Christopher Somerville

Reviewed by the book group at Wordsworth House, Cumbria

In *The January Man*, Somerville recalls a year spent exploring Britain on foot, following routes that remind him of his father. He reminisces about his relationship with his father and their walks together, while sharing snippets of history and culture, along with observations of wildlife and nature through the seasons. Some of us liked the father/son tale, while others felt inspired to go walking by the depiction of the outdoors. However, we wondered if the two sit together – is this a walking book or a memoir? At times the mix of genres felt disjointed. Overall there was much we liked, including the book's cover depicting images from every chapter and season. But at times it was perhaps overdescriptive, meaning we couldn't always 'see' the walks, even if we'd been there ourselves.

The Wild Other

by Clover Stroud

Reviewed by the book group at Killerton, Devon

The Wild Other explores how 16-year-old Clover copes with the aftermath of her mother's brain injury, and follows the impact of the accident on herself and her siblings until their mother's death 22 years later. Clover immerses herself in a series of challenging and often dangerous experiences to try to escape her own pain – the wild other of the title. Horses and her relationships with men characterise the story, which shifts between Oxfordshire, Ireland, Texas and Georgia. *The Wild Other* touched on being an impressive read, but didn't quite convey the implied spiritual power of nature. We found the plight of Clover and her family and the coping strategies they showed engaging, but as events shift between past and present, we felt some areas of Clover's life were left unexplored. ○

Mike Cable, Peter Lohmeyer, Harry Durkin