

# Nigel Wheatley - A Very Short Biography

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## The Early Days

Born in 1960 I grew up in Gloucestershire, England, where, in 1975, I first wrote about the birds and other wildlife I came across while happily roaming the woods and fields; my 'nature diaries' now number 37 volumes. After graduating with a BSc Honours degree in Biology from Portsmouth University in 1982 I took my first job as **Project Manager for the Gloucester Wildlife Project**, working for the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and Gloucester Centre for Environmental Education. I was responsible for promoting awareness of the natural environment throughout the local community and appeared regularly in the county newspapers and on local radio.

## Travel Experience

There were no such things as 'Gap Years' in the 80s but when the project ended I took one anyway and travelled around Britain, Europe and the Indian subcontinent, including some weeks in the wonderful Himalayas of north Pakistan searching, without success alas, for Snow Leopards. Since those first days abroad in 1985 I have travelled to all seven continents, some several times, in search of wild places and the wildlife which completes them. Few are as wild as Antarctica and South Georgia, two truly awesome places on planet Earth, but, if I had to pick a favourite part of the world it would have to be Africa, where I have travelled widely in Gambia, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Malawi, although I also have extensive experience of the Americas, Asia and Australasia including Papua New Guinea, where a young birder's long-held dreams of a land enlivened by fantasy birds came true.

## Work as a professional conservationist

Back in Britain in 1986 I took the post of **Field Officer for the London Borough of Camden**. Working for the London Wildlife Trust I was once again responsible for promoting awareness of nature throughout the local community. I was based at Camley Street Natural Park and when the position of **Park Manager** for there came up I successfully applied for it and found myself in charge of a nature reserve, not just any old nature reserve, but one of the world's leading urban reserves, an internationally-renowned and high-profile project. It was a top job but I left it to fulfil another dream, of visiting Africa, where I spent three fantastic months wandering around Kenya.

On my return the London Wildlife Trust took me on again, as **Project Manager for the Thamesmead Wildlife Project**, and once again I set about my task of promoting awareness of wildlife enthusiastically; guiding walks, presenting talks, putting on exhibitions, writing a regular newspaper column and appearing on local radio, and two years later market research by the Community Development Foundation revealed that 29% of Thamesmead residents knew about the project and that the only 'community project' which was better known was the Citizen's Advice Bureau. I also successfully secured funding for a Visitor Centre at the reserve I was in charge of. Having worked in such a centre in my previous position I was heavily involved in its design, but it was the architect who won the Civic Trust Award for it.

### **Going freelance**

Once the Reserve Visitor Centre was under construction I felt the time was right to move on again. Heavily influenced for many years now by *The Way to an Island* by Ronald Lockley and *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, particularly Thoreau's philosophy of, 'There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature', my plan was to become an **Author and Consultant** so that I could live somewhere in the midst of nature, unlike most of a metropolis like London. In 1996, without enough money to buy a property – it had all gone on travelling - I still managed to figure out a way to move to the Isles of Scilly, my favourite place in the world, by securing an old holiday let for rent.

### **Conservation Expertise**

I lived on those beautiful islands for over nine years, paying my way writing books and carrying out consultancy work, at home and abroad, which mainly involved research, surveys and extensive consultations with organisations ranging from local authorities through private property development companies to international non-governmental conservation bodies, in order to produce Environmental Impact Assessments, Habitat Creation Plans, Landscaping and Nature Reserve Design Proposals, and Management and Development Plans.

### **Writing**

I wrote a series of six books for the Helm imprint of A & C Black Publishers Ltd and their associated overseas publishers such as Princeton University Press, entitled *Where to watch birds in: South America; Africa; Asia; Australasia and Oceania; Europe and Russia; and Central America and the Caribbean*. These books were a labour of love, born of my seemingly innate passion to encourage and help people to visit and enjoy the world's

best places for birds and other wildlife, most of which also happen to be the most beautiful wild places on Earth. For those needing no encouragement I saw my duty as enhancing their experience by providing them with the information necessary to maximise the enjoyment of their experience.

Writing books of this nature requires a high degree of self-motivation and self-discipline. They are designed to be of practical use and as such are subject to severe scrutiny by a highly critical audience so one has to make absolutely sure, as with similar work, that the data compilation and analysis is not only factually correct but presented lucidly. I am pleased to say that the books have been generally well-received. The first was 'Highly Recommended' in *British Birds* magazine's Best Bird Book of 1995 competition, mainly due to its innovative style, and the Europe and Russia volume, published in 2000, was described as 'Europe's new birding bible' in a review by the popular high-street *Birdwatch* Magazine.

## **Voluntary Work**

Throughout my life I have helped conduct various breeding bird surveys organised by the British Trust for Ornithology, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and been involved in practical nature conservation management tasks on reserves.

I am currently writing the seabirds section for the Cornwall Bird Watching and Preservation Society (CBWPS) annual Bird Report. For some of the time when I lived on the Isles of Scilly I also helped write and edit the annual Bird Report, and was Chair of the Isles of Scilly Ornithological Records Committee, and during most of my time in London I served on the London Ornithological Records Committee, assessing records and writing sections of the annual Bird Reports.

## **Today**

When I met Alice, my partner, who did not live on the Isles of Scilly, I was happy to move on again, and, after some travelling (of course!), we now live just across the water from the islands, by the sea in spectacular far west Cornwall, with our two young sons. Here, still unable to shake off the desire to encourage others to travel to the world's wild places I have continued some consultancy work, written over 50 articles for *Wild Travel* magazine and built the **Where to Watch Birds and Other Wildlife in the World website**.

## **Nigel Wheatley**

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