

I have lived in Shropshire my whole married life, but only picked up a camera four years ago. The borders have been my swimming hole, my walking adventure, my children's playground. For twenty five years, I have marvelled at the folding bulk of the Long Mynd, the sudden rearing of roe deer from the wood at Linley, the far darting blue of kingfisher and the midnight boogy-shuffle of badger. Yet these sights were only of passing interest, the background to the landscape of my living days and nights. I had family, work and a whole soupçon of delightful and exhausting distractions from what lay in front of my eyes.

The camera changed everything. This impossible object in my hands, with its evolutionary complications, was a species in its own right that could easily bear a lifetime's study. When I lifted it to my eye and sharpened my focus, the Marches were remade into new and surprising territory. How could I know that barn owl, when hungry, sometimes hunted by day? Or that wren, in a display of tiny insouciance, would build his nest in the hedge where I park my car? This was a third eye, which when opened, revealed Eden, or at the very least a wildlife that struggled to persist alongside humanity. Each October, our county transformed to a facsimile of Canada as huge salmon leaped the weir at Ludlow and Shrewsbury. When my friend Ric told me about this, I laughed in disbelief at such local magnificence.

Only the sight of silver, waterborne beings taking to the air through a flick of muscle, was I convinced and then, utterly blown away. Slowly, through diligence, and stalking, and hours, and days, and friends, and persistence, I discovered a different OS map that lay beneath the footpath friendly way.

This map was not only concerned with place, but time, hour and season. If those figures matched up and coincided, then there was the possibility of: crossbills in November at Bury Ditches; bitterns in February at Welshpool; linnets, summer dawns and purple heather under a full moon on the Stiperstones; ravens cruising all year round the airways and airport rocks of the Long Mynd.



The list goes on, added to only by experience, walking, looking, listening. We call Shropshire the borderlands, and my borders began to expand every day.

Even landscape became a target to stalk. It had a territory – the top of the Stiperstones, the Long Mynd, Bury Ditches and a time when best to see it display all its landed glory – the quiet moments when the world sleeps or is elsewhere about the busy-ness of life. Dawn, dusk and the starlit night were the aim of my lens, camera body and settings. The capture of light, be it rising, falling or spread across the sky in an infinite seasoning of bright and hot pepper.

Here is a flavour then of what I have found: stories of wildlife rescue, farmers fighting to save new born lambs, the great grace of hawk flight and the flare of first fledglings from peregrine to flycatcher, the dance of hare and stare of fox, the mist that coddles all of dawn on Christmas Eve, the Milky Way that splays its disco lights above the Stiperstones. This could be called a love song, or a summing up of all that I hold dear about my county. I hope it is not a requiem, found in a dusty box in some hundred years where children marvel at the animals and birds long gone. Maybe, if enough beauty is reflected back from lens, and paper and pages of a book, it might make us pause to think and hopefully fight to save this sliver of wilderness from the inexorable hand of progress.



Female Roe deer *Capreolus capreolus* **Lydbury North:** Canon 7d, 150-600, 1/1000 sec, F6.3, ISO 2500 **Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis* **with Three-spined stickleback** *Gasterosteus aculeatus:* Canon 1 dx, 500mm, 1/500 sec, F4, ISO 400 **Walcot Lake at dawn:** Canon 6d, 17-40mm, 1/500 sec, F4, ISO 100