“The end of an era” as Professor Nick Sotherton retires from the GWCT

Wednesday 1 July, 2020

After 44 years with the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT), Director of Research, Advisory and Education, Professor Nick Sotherton is retiring this week (30 June 2020). Professor Sotherton has been with the Hampshire-based conservation charity since joining to study for his PhD in 1976. He has been Director of Research since 1998 and in 2015 he took on the additional role of Director of Advisory and Education.

GWCT Chief Executive Teresa Dent CBE said: *“We will miss Nick enormously and the GWCT owes him a great deal. Nick has been a driving force at the Trust and in the field of agricultural science, especially on farmland, throughout his career. Many of his innovations have been agri-environment prescriptions from the start of those schemes, such as beetle banks, and are now seen across the country. This is the end of an era for us.”*

Reflecting on his time with the GWCT, Professor Sotherton said: *“Almost from day one, I was told that the organisation was about “turning words into birds” and 40 years on, this motto is still the driving force behind what we are and what we do. Our research needs to have an impact on the ground. On the back of quality research, we provide an evidence base for those making management decisions over large tracts of land, be they farmers or policy makers. I have been proud to lead a team of talented scientists and advisors, committed to wildlife conservation in our countryside.”*

In response to Professor Sotherton’s retirement, Mark Tufnell, Deputy President of the Country Land and Business Association (CLA), said: *“Nick will be a hard act to follow. He has had a tremendous career with the Trust and so many achievements. He has inspired many of us to become conservationists.”*

Liam Stokes, Chief Executive of the British Game Alliance, said: *“I am very sad to see Nick go. He gave a number of inspiring talks to our gamekeeping and our conservation students at Lackham and I remember his provocative address to our conservation students in particular, challenging them to think about their approach to game and wildlife management as conservationists. He leaves behind a tremendous legacy of research.”*

Following Professor Sotherton’s retirement, the role of Director of Research, Advisory and Education is being split. The GWCT’s current head of wetland research, Dr Andrew Hoodless, will become Interim Director of Research, and Dr Roger Draycott, the Trust’s head of advisory, will take on the role of Interim Director of Advisory & Education.

New appointments at GWCT

Following Professor Sotherton’s retirement, **Dr Andrew Hoodless will become Interim Director of Research**. Andrew has been GWCT’s head of wetland research since 2010. He joined the Game Conservancy Trust in the early 1990s, when the Trust sponsored his PhD on woodcock. Since then he has worked in the Uplands and Lowlands research teams, on black grouse and capercaillie projects in Scotland, the Upland Predation Experiment in Northumberland and work to quantify the effects of gamebird releasing on woodland wildlife. He initiated the first national survey of breeding woodcock in 2003 and, as head of wetland research, he has worked on woodcock migration, assessing the effectiveness of agri-environment measures for lapwings, reversing wader declines in the Avon Valley and on links between breeding and winter habitats for curlew, lapwing and oystercatcher using GPS tracking.

On his new appointment, Dr Hoodless commented: *“I strongly believe in the importance of science to inform conservation management. Using research to provide policy makers and practitioners with solutions to conservation issues is at the core of what the GWCT does. The breadth of knowledge and expertise on game and wildlife within the GWCT’s research department is unique and I am grateful for the opportunity to lead such a motivated team.”*

Dr Roger Draycott will take on the role of Interim Director of Advisory and Education. From a farming background and with a PhD in pheasant ecology, Roger has worked at the GWCT since 1993. He commented: *“I spent many years studying and quantifying the effects of game management on wildlife and habitats and have spent recent years working with farmers and game managers to maximise*

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the conservation benefits that good game and wildlife management can deliver. I'm delighted to be able to continue and expand this programme of work in my new role as Director of Advisory and Education."

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