

BACKCHAT



A quick chat with...
Joe Harkness,
author of *Bird Therapy*

What first sparked your interest in birdwatching, and when?

My Grandad instilled an interest in birds in me from a young age but, as an adult, it was two Buzzards displaying over a Norfolk tree-line in 2013, just after my breakdown. Their enchanting swoops and mewing calls captivated me.

Who was your birdwatching inspiration or mentor?

My Grandad was my inspiration, and my mentor was a Norfolk birder named Kieran. He was there for me as I rebuilt my life, taught me so much, and we shared some amazing birding experiences together, a lot of which feature in my book.

Do you bird alone or with a friend?

Generally, alone.

Your dream bird to see?

I'd like to see some of the divers in breeding plumage.

Your favourite birding spot?

Either my local tract of heathland in Norfolk or Happisburgh on the north-east Norfolk coast.

Your classic birder's lunch, grabbed from the petrol station shop?

A takeout Americano coffee, sausage roll and plain Walkers (other crisps are available!).

Grey Wagtail or Yellow Wagtail?

Grey.

Favourite bird song or call?

Wood Lark.

Birdwatching's biggest myth or misconception?

That you have to own stupidly expensive optics to enjoy it. It's just not true and I suffered with pointless 'scope envy' for years. I honestly spend more time looking with my eyes, listening to natural sounds and absorbing how a moment with birds actually feels, than I spend looking through optics.

The best bird you've seen?

That depends on how you define 'best'? The rarest was the 2015 Burnham Overy Citril Finch. At my inland patch, Smew or Yellow-browed Warbler.

Identifying gulls - nightmare or a nice day out?

Total nightmare. Recurring.

Your favourite bird joke?

Q. Why are there no Aspirins in the rainforest?
Q. Because the parrots eat 'em all.
Ouch!

How do we encourage young people to watch birds?

I've written about this a lot. Positive birdwatching role models are so important. Friendliness and being willing to talk to younger people and share what you're watching. I also think that every school should have a bird-feeding area, regardless.



Joe featured on Winterwatch earlier this year alongside Chris Packham CBE

Grey Plover or Golden Plover?

Golden

The one place you'd love to go birdwatching?

I've never been birding abroad, so literally anywhere. How about somewhere in eastern Europe?

A birding or conservation issue you feel strongly about?

I'm very keen to break down some of the stereotypes around birding and birders. It's a big part of what I do.

The bird that annoys you most?

I don't know why, but I find Starlings annoying when they boss my feeders.

Bogey bird that still eludes you?

For a very long time it was Crossbill. Now it's Quail.

The bird book you'd never be without?

Collins Bird Guide.

Why do you love birdwatching, in three words?

Natural escape clause.

Advice for birders taking part in our #My200BirdYear challenge?

While going to a variety of places, like reserves, may seem like the best way to reach that magic number. I'd personally focus on one or two sites, perhaps one inland and one coastal. That way, you can fully immerse yourself in the wonders of migration, breeding birds and seasonal changes: and it'll help you feel closer to nature.

Bird Therapy in print

Joe has written about his experiences in *Bird Therapy*, due for release later this year. You can follow Joe on Twitter @birdtherapy or visit birdtherapy.blog



“I'M VERY KEEN TO BREAK DOWN SOME OF THE STEREOTYPES AROUND BIRDING AND BIRDERS. IT'S A BIG PART OF WHAT I DO”

ILLUSTRATIONS: LAUREN NICHOSON

