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978-1-107-19132-7 — Modern British Nature Writing, 1789–2020

Will Abberley, Christina Alt, David Higgins, Graham Huggan, Pippa Marland  
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## MODERN BRITISH NATURE WRITING, 1789–2020

Why do we speak so much of nature today when there is so little of it left? Prompted by this question, this study offers the first full-length exploration of modern British nature writing, from the late eighteenth century to the present. Focusing on non-fictional prose writing, the book supplies new readings of classic texts by Romantic, Victorian, Modern and contemporary authors, situating these within the context of an enduringly popular genre. Nature writing is still widely considered fundamentally celebratory or escapist, yet it is also very much in tune with the conflicts of a natural world under threat. The book's five authors connect these conflicts to the triple historical crisis of the environment, of representation, and of modern dissociated sensibility. This book offers an informed critical approach to modern British nature writing for specialist readers, as well as a valuable guide for general readers concerned by an increasingly diminished natural world.

WILL ABBERLEY is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Sussex. His previous monographs are *English Fiction and the Evolution of Language, 1850–1914* (2015) and *Mimicry and Display in Victorian Culture* (2020). He is currently writing a book on emotions and authority in Victorian natural history literature.

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PIPPA MARLAND is Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the University of Bristol. Her project 'The Pen and the Plough' explores the representation of farming in British nature writing. She has published widely on eco-poetry and creative non-fiction and is the author of *Ecocriticism and the Island* (forthcoming 2022).

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# MODERN BRITISH NATURE WRITING, 1789–2020

*Land Lines*

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## *Acknowledgements*

*Modern British Nature Writing, 1789–2020* is a co-written book rather than a collection of individual essays. It reflects discussions over several years between its five authors, all of whom have contributed to every part of the book. Nonetheless, individuals led on particular chapters in line with their areas of specialism. David Higgins led on Chapter 1, Will Abberley on Chapter 2 and Graham Huggan on Chapter 4. Christina Alt laid the groundwork for Chapter 3, with additional contributions from Graham Huggan and Pippa Marland. Parts of Chapter 4 have been published before, in modified form, in the following journal articles: ‘Affective Animals: Transspecies Encounters in Modern British Animal Writing’, *Humanimalia*, 12 (2020), 210–35; ‘Back to the Future: The “New Nature Writing”, Ecological Boredom, and the Recall of the Wild’, *Prose Studies*, 38 (2016), 152–71. Thanks are owed to the publishers of these journals for allowing us to reproduce material here. We would like to thank our respective institutions – the Universities of Bristol, Leeds, St Andrews and Sussex – for the support they have given us during the course of this project. We would also like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which sponsored the original ‘Land Lines’ project from which this book sprang (2017–19), as well as the two smaller projects that followed on from it (2020–1). Mike Collins deserves particular thanks for supporting and developing the project’s public engagement activities. Thanks are also due to the Leverhulme Trust, which provided additional support via a Philip Leverhulme Prize awarded to Will Abberley. Finally, thanks to the various non-academic partners with whom we have had the privilege of working in connection with these projects. These include but are by no means restricted to Natural England and the National Trust, the Booth Museum (in Brighton) and the First Chances Academy (in St Andrews), and (all in Yorkshire) Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Hatfield Woodhouse Primary School and Castle Howard Estate. This book, which began life in 2017, was eventually completed under the lockdown conditions of 2020

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and early 2021. We are very grateful to Cambridge University Press for its flexibility and understanding. As is made explicit later in the book but should be evident throughout, Covid-19 has brought home to us that viruses as well as humans are part of nature, even as the pandemic has restricted our physical access to the natural world. Hard lessons remain to be learned about human-animal interdependencies as well as the proper management of our environment, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, there has been a boom in nature writing as our collective awareness of these co-dependencies has spread. British nature writing today is as popular as it has ever been, lending hope for a better future while reminding us of persistent inequalities within our society – and within a deeply divided and ecologically impoverished world. This book is dedicated to all those who seek and have sought in the past to protect and promote the natural world: all of it, and for all our sakes.