

PREFACE

This book is not intended to be a showcase of nature photography, but a record of some of the wildlife and plants that depend on this small patch of woodland for their existence. Perhaps more than anything, I have tried to capture the spirit of the place, a place where nature can live and procreate without the threat of its habitat being destroyed – at least for the time being. It is also a place where I, my family and friends, can relax and gain spiritual enrichment in a ‘real’ world which is vanishing rapidly.

More locally, the book is a plea to save the countryside of Sussex, which is being destroyed exponentially by development of thousands of extra houses and their attendant infrastructure – all to satisfy a never-ending expansion of the human population in a small country.

About the Photography

Almost all the photographs in this book were taken in Rookery Wood within the last few years, using natural light, except for the high-speed flash images which, for complex technical reasons, had to be taken in my studio. Ten different cameras were employed to capture these images. Apart from spotting and dealing with minor blemishes and colour balance adjustments, digital manipulation has been avoided.

Stephen Dalton
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Nuthatch hunting insects

This dapper little bird, *Sitta europaea*, is more often heard than seen. Its wide range of loud and rapid calls echo around the wood almost every day in spring or early summer. Nuthatches are omnivorous, feeding on insects, nuts and seeds. They nest in existing holes in trees and walls, often reducing the size of the holes by plastering them up with mud.





Speckled bush cricket leaping

The speckled bush cricket *Leptophyes punctatissima* is commonly found in bramble thickets and nettle beds close to hedgerow and woodland borders. Unlike the majority of species in its family, this one is unusually quiet, capable of only weak chirps. The ears of bush crickets are located on their forelegs – a single hole with two eardrums.

The high speed set-up was originally intended for a hoverfly, but while looking for a suitable fly, I found this handsome cricket, so I took it back to the studio and promptly placed it on the fly's take-off perch. Much to my surprise and without delay, the insect leaped through the precise plane of focus, the depth of field being less than the width of the subject. The chance of this occurring is very remote. The insect was suitably rewarded with immediate release back to the wood.



White Admiral

The White Admiral reveals its stunning underside marked with subtle silvery-blue, brown, black and white hues, vying for subtle beauty with any other butterfly. The caterpillar feeds on honeysuckle and survives the winter by building a silken hibernaculum that remains attached to the food plant even after the plant has withered and died.



Hazel Dormouse

Although there is strong evidence to support the presence of dormice *Muscardinus avellanarius* in Rookery Wood today, I have been unable to photograph them here for the simple reason that it is illegal to capture or interfere with these threatened mammals in any way. This photograph was taken of a local dormouse in the 1980s, when such regulations did not apply. With the thick growth of dense scrub and developing hazel coppice, this wood is ideal for these charming mammals, so the image could not be omitted!

Although dormice have the reputation of being very slow and dozy, they can put on a surprising turn of speed and even jump well when the need arises. These animals go into deep hibernation from November to April.

Visitors to Rookery Wood caught by my trail camera



Clockwise from top left: 1. Badger rooting around for slugs or snails at base of tree 2. Suspicious fox peering at trail camera 3. Buzzard about to fly off with a rat caught on the narrow woodland path 4. Fox hunting on wooded path at twilight 5. Stoat dragging rabbit over ditch 6. Muntjac breaking into my wood under the newly-erected fence.