

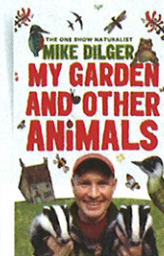
## BBC Country File

Circulation: 28000  
Readership: 68000  
Display Rate (£/cm<sup>2</sup>): 6.70

- SEP 2012



## My wildlife haven



### MY GARDEN AND OTHER ANIMALS

MIKE DILGER

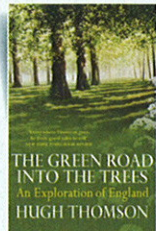
Collins

£14.99

ISBN: 9780007457700

books essential reading this month...

## Walk through time



### THE GREEN ROAD INTO THE TREES

HUGH THOMSON

Preface Publishing

£18.99

ISBN: 9781848093324

In the last few months there has been a surge of pastoral writing sweeping into the bookshops and across our airwaves. It isn't so surprising. In these uncertain times, there is something both comforting and reassuring about getting back to the land. Ancient green roads, and this one in particular, have a way of putting everything into perspective as we travel beside the ghosts of our ancestors and become mere specks in England's history.

Hugh Thomson's gloriously unhurried account of walking the Icknield Way, strewn with Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Age monuments and earthworks, unfurls that history in an easy and often lyrical way. Following in the footsteps of one of his heroes, Edward Thomas (who walked the track 100 years before), he takes us from the small Norman chapel high on its hill above Abbotsbury and the Dorset coast, to Holme-next-the-Sea in Norfolk, where the charcoal remains of Seahenge were found buried beneath the shifting sands.

His conversations with people he encounters along the way, such as the naked circle dancers near Avebury, are often funny and always enlightening, but Thomson's evident reverence for past writers who have hymned this landscape add extraordinary depth to the journey, as well as understanding of man's primal need for nature.

For instance, the great

**ABOVE** Walking ancient paths connects us with landscapes, lost peoples... and ourselves

pastoral writer Richard Jeffries wrote of climbing towards the Ridgeway (which comprises a large section of the Icknield Way): "Moving up the sweet short turf, at every step my heart seemed to obtain a wider horizon of feeling". The track then descends to the flat country and that strong presence goes, but Thomson keeps us entertained with his observations. "As always when entering Norfolk, I felt like one of Napoleon's foot soldiers entering Russia."

This is a book for climbing back into the landscape with and feeling safe and grounded: a perfect antidote to the rushing and anxiety ridden complications of modern life.

★★★★★

Candida Lycett Green is a country author and journalist.

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After years without a permanent base, *The One Show's* naturalist bought a house near Bristol and set about transforming the garden into a wildlife haven. As someone who has made several wildlife gardens, I identify totally with Dilger's enthusiasm about acquiring a new garden and planning all the amazing habitats that the wildlife will one day embrace. Hope and optimism overcome reality and practicality, but the end result is always something magical to be proud of.

Dilger writes about his journey along this road with just the enthusiasm you would expect, in a wonderfully entertaining way. This is not a 'how to make a wildlife garden' book but it does exactly describe what it is like to become totally absorbed in creating one. Mike's partner Christina's illustrations contribute perfectly to this quirky and engaging book, which is a joy to read.

★★★★★

Jenny Steel is a ecologist, writer and keen wildlife gardener.

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