

## Phil Page

### Yarner Wood National Nature Reserve.

The woodland, after being worked so intensively round about the 1900s the woodland was really abandoned, it was used as a private estate; there was a gamekeeper, we know, from the 1930s, there was a bit of pheasant shooting and general game shooting here, but it really was a neglected estate until the 1950s and the woodland itself was purchased in 1951 when the Yarner Estate was broken up. The Yarner Estate was a huge estate including several of the local farms and houses, and this wood was purchased by what was then the Nature Conservancy and it was one of the first six National Nature Reserves to be declared, and that was back in May 1952. Since then its been managed primarily for, originally for forestry, but probably more recently for Nature Conservation purposes. And the aim of the Nature Conservation management is to restore a natural woodland structure, and that's been done through reducing the number of trees; I mean that may sound strange, but having fewer and bigger old trees and more veteran trees, which are trees, generally anything over a hundred years old, and slightly older. So man intervened and exploited the woodland probably for 150 years or more, and what we've been doing since the 1950s is trying to conserve that woodland. The woodland itself is very well known for its bird populations, you've got a good representation of upland oak wood birds which include pied flycatchers, redstarts, wood warblers, and we've also got buzzards nesting in the woodland here and sparrow-hawk. Adjoining Yarner Wood of course, and this is one of the charms of this particular locality, we've got some wonderful heath and moorland where we've got birds of lowland heathland, such as the nightjar and Dartford warbler in good numbers, so within a fairly small area you've got birds of both upland and lowland and heathland and woodland habitats and that's one of the factors that helps make this such a diverse environment.

Another interesting thing about Yarner Wood, I mentioned earlier that there's a blank period of neglect from 1900 to really 1951 but we know a bit about what it was like here from the novels of Eden Phillpotts, he wrote a novel which was centred on Yarner Wood and its gamekeepers and local residents and that was written in 1912, the novel is called *The Forest on the Hill*, which when you look out here is a very good name for the site anyway, and there are some quite nice descriptions of the woodland and the plants and animals that occur in the woodland at that time, and its very noticeable, it's a very important part of the book that access into this site was denied, and one of the main roles of the gamekeeper was to keep out the public, as well as doing the work with the pheasants and killing off predators, but it's a very good read and a very good description of what life was like here at that time.