

GOOD NATURED JOE WOODMAN



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NATURED**
A PODCAST SERIES FROM
CONSERVATION OPTIMISM

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INTRO

Sofia: Hello and welcome to Good Natured, a podcast that shines a light on conservation successes and challenges.

Julia: I'm Julia!

Sofia: And I'm Sofia!

Julia: We're thrilled to be back for a second season of the Good Natured Podcast.

Sofia: This year, we are doing things slightly differently and we are going to start with four weekly mini-episodes called Nature Notes, which feature nature related stories.

Julia: And we will then release our normal length episodes from mid-August so make sure to check your feed, to find the latest episodes!

Sofia: Our first inaugural Nature Note was recorded by Joe Woodman.

Julia: Joe is a DPhil student at the University of Oxford and he has an interest in animal behavior, ecology and evolution.

Sofia: Joe works in Wytham Woods, collecting data from a natural community of birds, and he loves watching and learning about birds.

Julia: And he also enjoys traveling with an aim to discover, photograph and write about local natural history. And today, Joe is going to tell us all about his experience, searching for red squirrels in the British island of Tresco.

MINI-EPISODE

Joe: Can you imagine a place in the UK where one of our most beautiful, rare and elusive animals can be seen without so much as leaving a picnic table, hopping between the benches as you eat your lunch and dashing across the paths as you stroll around. Well, although this hasn't always been the case, this place really does exist.

Red squirrels are one of Britain's most endangered mammals, once common but now found few and far between after being hit hard by the squirrel pox virus spread by their invasive grey squirrel cousins.

But a little less than 10 years ago, the reds were introduced to the island of Tresco in the Isles of Scilly, a small archipelago a little way off lands ending in Cornwall. I have a strong family connection with the Isles of Scilly, visiting the islands for at least once a year for as long as I can remember.

Being historically isolated and distant from the mainland I've found it has relatively unique wildlife compared to the rest of the UK. From occasional stopovers of exotic migrant birds that are blown off course, too many fewer invasive species and larger mammals that are found in the rest of Great Britain.

And so with no natural predators or graze to give them squirrel pox, it's an ideal location for a community of red squirrels to prosper and things look good for their future. I visited Tresco during their first year on the island and I was absolutely desperate to see one, having never seen the species before. I set off with my binoculars and a clear image of their iconic red bushy tail and tufted ears in my head.

I can clearly remember the strong piney smell of the woods as I relentlessly searched through the forest for hours, pausing every now and then as I found a good spot to wait in silence in an attempt to catch at least just a glimpse of one. This was repeated every day I was there. Even setting up a track camera only to catch footage of bemused walkers wandering through the trees.

Only 20 squirrels were introduced to Tresco so there only could have been a few of them in the forest that time. I wasn't successful and went home wondering whether I'd ever get to see the reds on the shores of Tresco.

But a few years down the line and it's now almost impossible to visit the islands without seeing them walking into the Abbey gardens I'm instantly hit by the mechanical yet oddly soft sound of the norming of forage nuts as a flash of russet red leaps from one spindly branch to another in the corner of my eye.

It's such a treat to sit and watch these characters as they chase each other playfully like clockwork toys whizzing around the trunks of trees. I remember the first time I saw one at the feeding stations that have been installed in the gardens. It was such a shock to see one of Britain's rarest mammals, happily munching away as I sat and took photos, barely five meters in front of it.

And although I'll never have that same feeling of excitement as I did, when I first saw one. It's still a pleasure to watch wildlife lovers of all ages, walk into the gardens and see that very same moment of shock delights that I remembers so clearly.

Tresco is now a haven from the reds where so long as I'm at the right end of the island, I'm almost guaranteed to see them, whether that be on a walk through the woods or when having an ice cream outside the café.

The community is now thriving in harmony with the humans that visit and work on Tresco. And I feel incredibly lucky that I've been able to follow this genuine wildlife success story.

OUTRO

Julia: We hope you enjoyed this week's Nature Note from Joe, and if you have any reactions to it or any thoughts, you can reach us on Twitter at ConservOptimism or drop us an email at podcast@conservationoptimism.org.

The music for this episode is by Blue Dot Sessions and is available on the Free Music Archive. This mini episode was produced and edited by Sofia Castelló y Tickell and myself Julia Migné.

Sofia: Thanks to the Conservation Optimism micro interns, Elizabeth Brown, and Emma Felin for their help with the music. Our theme song was composed and produced by Matthew Kemp. This season of Good Natured was funded by Synchronicity Earth, the Whitley Fund for Nature and the University of Oxford Departmental Public Engagement with Research Seed Fund.