

PROGRAMME INFORMATION –

Station: BBC Radio 4
Title: NATURE – The Sounds of Britain 1. Wicken Fen
Date / Time: Monday 10 September at 21.02 – 21.30
repeat Tuesday 11 September at 11.02-11.30

Producer : Sarah Blunt
BBC Natural History Radio Unit, 0117 9742442

SYNOPSIS

In the first of a short series of richly evocative sound portraits, writer and naturalist Paul Evans and wildlife sound recordist Chris Watson, capture the spirit and sounds of wild Britain.

In the first programme, a wonderfully lively, lyrical and entertaining narration written and read by Paul Evans, and illustrated with sounds of the wildlife and habitat recorded by Chris Watson, offers a very personal and fascinating exploration of the reed beds, ditches and dykes of Britain's oldest nature reserve, Wicken Fen.

The programme tracks the course of a single day on this ancient landscape from before dawn until after dusk.

“... It is still dark when I arrive at the visitor centre at Wicken Fen, cold and windy too. And if the dawn chorus walk is supposed to begin before birds start singing, no one told the birds: they're pressing on regardless. Suddenly, a sound rings out that quickens my pulse - a cuckoo. It's a kind of binary notation balancing precariously on the axis of a tiny silence. The notes can stand for opposites: north and south, winter and spring, presence and absence - all the things the cuckoo symbolises.”

As the minutes pass, other birds join the cuckoo as the orchestra of the dawn chorus strikes up amongst the reeds. There's the wren *“For a bird which weighs as much as a hiccup, the wren has a ferociously powerful voice”*, a song thrush, a blackbird and then the reed bed specialists; reed and sedge warbler, and perhaps strangest of all *“...What sounds like a rapidly winding fishing reel, or one of those clockwork toys which travels up a string, turns out to be a grasshopper warbler”*.

As the sun rises and the dawn chorus fades, Paul explores the watery highways of the Fen in a flat bottomed green boat *“like an upturned beetle”*, and encounters a herd of Konik ponies, parachuting reed warblers, and an angry hissing swan. He then wanders round the reserve, intrigued by a poetry of place names, considers the history of the fens, their origin and man's abuse of our watery heritage, and then as the light fades, Paul clammers up the tall wooden tower which overlooks this landscape, and listens to the churring of the insect night chorus.

NATURE: the Sound of Britain – an absorbing evocative sound-rich portrait of one of Britain's most iconic landscapes.