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Militarised natural history: Tales of the avocet's return to
postwar Britain

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Abstract

Absent as a breeding bird from Britain for at least a century, avocets (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) began nesting on the east coast of Britain, in Suffolk, shortly after the end of the Second World War, having homed in on two spots on Britain's coast that had been flooded for war-related reasons. The avocets' presence was surrounded in secrecy, while a dedicated few kept up a protective watch over them. As the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) took over responsibility for the flourishing colony, they claimed the episode as a symbol of success for British protection, later making the bird their logo. Counter to the RSPB's story of protecting a British bird, I read the narratives of events in terms of making a bird British. I show how, as postwar Britain slumped economically and spiritually and tried to rebuild itself, the birds became a

vehicle for formulating national identity: of Britain as a home to which to return and belong. Exploring the themes of returning servicemen and closed territories, the paper also examines the episode in terms of the naturalisation of the military and the militarisation of nature.



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Keywords

Ornithology; Bird protection; Nature conservation; Avocet; National identity; Militarism

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