

Changing Landscapes: The extraordinary local

Inspired by the No Mow May initiative, Ted Leeming leaves the grass to grow and adopts an insect's eye view for a project that extols the virtues of allowing the natural world to re-establish itself and its myriad habitats



In 2004 I visited the same location in Assynt, a 12-hour drive from my home, 26 times on four separate visits to capture a single image in pre-imagined light. I waited two years for the right season, weather and light to realise another. And yet the actual time at each location was little more than a few hours in total.

This location-based approach could not be further removed from the one adopted for our Zero Footprint project in 2009, where every image was taken from exactly the same place: the patio outside our kitchen door. And the truth is that I learned more about light, season, composition and technique on this project than any other I have worked on. For instead of chasing venues, the only focus was the subject and image itself.

Fourteen years on, the Zero Footprint concept influences every project we embark

on, informing both our practice and lifestyle as we reduce our desire for travel. And the honest truth is that in doing so, the rewards have been far greater than any loss, for I have discovered the exotic local and now spend time within the landscape rather than merely passing through.

My 2022 Pollenmakers project is a typical example, with every image taken within a short distance of the house and accessed solely on foot or by bike. This included multiple extended visits to familiar favourite spots, allowing the body to slow and mind to quietly relax, witness and learn.

The project materialised as part of the No Mow May initiative, where anyone can raise awareness and help change behaviours through enjoyably simple personal actions, highlighting the desperate plight of bees,

I don't know how an ant sees, and I didn't research whether they have the eyesight of a 100mm macro lens shooting at f/2.8, but I liked the effect. Crawling on the ground while shooting handheld and making tiny adjustments in composition, I became a tourist in the extraordinary world at our feet.

other pollinators and the pollen-makers upon which they depend. As the month progressed and my grass began to grow, I became increasingly fascinated by the sheer abundance and variety of plant species that almost immediately began to appear, having waited patiently within the seed bank for years. This even included various crop varieties from times long forgotten when the land had been tilled for food.

The incredible ability of nature to



re-establish if we allow her to was happening in front of my eyes. The end of the month came and went with the mower remaining silent. I explored the constantly changing vegetation, extending the range of discovery to include the aromatic hay meadows behind the house and the wild verges of the local roads, and imagined a future where every road has a 3m 'habitat' hedge running alongside, creating corridors of wildlife and reconnecting humans with nature.

For an alternative perspective, I took on the persona of an ant for the project and, with wide aperture and slowed mind, crawled childlike through a portal and into a magnificently unfamiliar universe. The

variety of subject matter exploded in front of my eyes along with my curiosity and I started reading around the subject. Biodiversity and habitats filled my thoughts as I became familiar with an infinitely diverse, complex and endlessly engaging environment, including the unique privilege as photographer that I could not only learn its wisdoms, but record its exquisite beauty and fragility. Travelling in the mind rather than reality while learning to empathise with my local surroundings is the single greatest reward of my wider Zero Footprint journey.

But it is the plight of nature that lies at the heart of this project. Almost half of all land animals have lost 80% of their range and, in the decade from 2005, an estimated 6 billion kg of glyphosate fertilisers were sprayed on fields and gardens to exterminate 'weeds' –

or to put another way, the pollen-makers. A recent study by the University of Sussex shows songbird numbers are down 25-40% in gardens using glyphosates and slug pellets. And here's a thought: when you see wilful flowerbeds, wildflowers and dandelions in a lawn, do you ever think that the person responsible may care more for nature than their neighbour whose beds are pristine and the grass mown to bowling-green perfection? Love local. Love nature. Have fun and be the change. Go wild with your photography and your garden.

To learn more, Ted and Morag have put a range of further information on their Wanderings of a Photographic Duo blog, which they regularly update with new ideas and learnings. Visit leemingpaterson.wordpress.com.