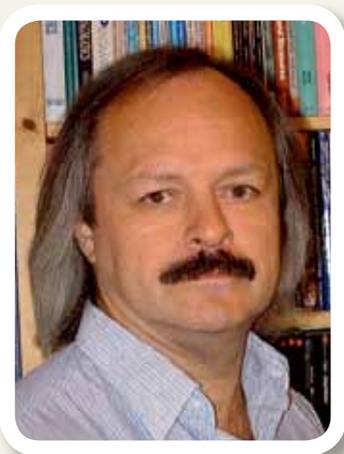


MEET THE AUTHOR

I was born in Walsall, a town in the area of the English Midlands known as The Black Country. I lived on the edge of the town, and I just had to cross the road to get into an enormous park, which extended right out into the open countryside. I spent most of my free time in the park and the fields and that started my love of the natural world. Then when I was 15, my parents took me on a camping holiday to Scotland, and that was the first time that I saw the ospreys that this story is about—we visited them at the famous Loch Garten site. And a year later I joined the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the birdwatching club that both of the boys in the story belong to.



When I was eighteen I went to college and made close friends with a student who went on to become a professional birdwatcher. We spent a lot of time watching birds and later he taught me how to catch them safely in nets and put rings on their legs in order to follow their movements.

After college I worked as a teacher and I also started writing poetry and short stories.

I have lived in Italy, Kosovo and Serbia and am currently living in Hungary and travel extensively throughout the world as part of my job as a freelance writer, teacher and teacher trainer.

And of course wherever I go I always see something or meet someone who is an inspiration for a story or a character or an unexpected twist in my latest piece of writing.

I hope you enjoy reading the story as much as I enjoyed writing it and will be inspired to get out and look at what is happening in the countryside near you.

ABOUT THE BOOK

The story of the return of the osprey to nest in Britain is amazing. Ospreys were hunted to extinction by 1910. After this they were only seen as they migrated to and from their nesting sites in Scandinavia and Russia. Then in 1954 a pair returned to Loch Garten in Scotland.

The RSPB set up a guard on the island under the trees where the birds had nested. Over the next few years they reared a number of chicks, but some of the eggs were stolen. Eventually Loch Garten became a Bird Reserve where the public could watch the birds and their chicks. Gradually, the young birds also returned and built nests on other lakes in Scotland and now there are over 100 pairs nesting each year.



Birdwatchers had been waiting for the first pair to breed further south in England. In recent years osprey pairs have bred successfully in Wales and Scotland. The osprey (Latin name: *Pandion haliaetus*) is a magnificent bird to look at. Its body is 50-60 cm long, and its wingspan is 150-170 cm.

One thing that makes it so interesting for birdwatchers is that, unlike most other birds of prey, the osprey eats fish. It catches them by flying high above the lake and then diving into the water, holding out its claws to catch the fish just before it hits the surface. It then holds the fish in its claws and flies out of the water to eat the fish on the branch of a tree, or at its nest.

The nest is a huge pile of sticks at the top of a tree. It is up to 1.5 meters in width, and the birds return to the same nest year after year. Ospreys migrate from Europe to sub-Saharan Africa to spend each winter, and return the following April to nest.

BEFORE READING

- 1 Think about the birds you know which live in your country. How many different ones can you name? See if you can write down the names of twelve birds. Do you know any of their names in English?

1	_____	2	_____	3	_____
4	_____	5	_____	6	_____
7	_____	8	_____	9	_____
10	_____	11	_____	12	_____

- 2 Look at the picture and write the words in the box in the correct places.

osprey fish nest
island pine tree lake



3 Who is who in the story? Match the descriptions to the pictures.



- a** Hello, I'm Don's dad. Don's really into birdwatching and I love looking at the pictures he takes.
- b** Hello, I'm Don Ball. I'm 15 and I love birdwatching. Oh, and I've got a quick temper, too.
- c** Hello there. I'm Sergeant Keddle. I'm the policeman in Sattley. It's usually quiet here, but then Mike and Don discovered something interesting.
- d** Hi, I'm Mike Peters, I'm 15 and I'm Don's best friend. I've got blond hair and my most prized possession is my binoculars.

 **4** Think and discuss. The osprey is an endangered species. What other endangered species do you know in the world? Why do animals, plants and birds become endangered? What happens when an animal, plant or bird becomes extinct? Do you know the names of any extinct wildlife? What can people do to prevent endangered species from becoming extinct?

5 The title of this book is "Operation Osprey". What do you think the story is going to be about?





1 A text invitation



I was coming home from school on the bus on Tuesday, when I got a text message from Mike. It was very short: Mkt X 7. UGNT. I knew that this meant he wanted to meet me at the Market Cross at seven o'clock that evening and that it was something urgent.

It was also a bit unusual. We'd arranged¹ to meet after school on Friday to plan our weekend's birdwatching as usual, so this must be something special. I felt excited!

Let me give you some background². My name's Don Ball. I'm fifteen and I go to Blueway Comprehensive School³. Mike (or Mike Peters, to give him his full name) is the same age and goes to the local grammar school, but we've been friends since junior school. We both live in the village of Saltley, which is in the Midlands.

We've been birdwatching together since we were 11. I suppose⁴ we're quite good at it now, because we do it regularly, read about it, use the Net to find out about birds, and we're members of a club for birdwatchers, too.

1 **arranged:** planned

2 **background:** extra details about the characters and story

3 **Comprehensive School:** secondary school for boys and girls of all abilities

4 **suppose:** think

THINK



- What do you think Mike is going to tell Don when they meet?



When I got home, I got some biscuits and orange juice and went up to my room to get on with¹ my homework so that I could go out and meet Mike later. It took me longer than usual to do it because my mind kept wandering², thinking of what Mike wanted to tell me. He must have seen an unusual bird. (Of course, I thought his text message must be because of a bird!!)

It was early April and birds which had gone south to warmer countries for the winter were coming back to Britain for the summer now. We were looking forward to “meeting old friends” . . . but there was always the chance of something rare and unusual arriving, too.

- 1 **get on with:** (here) do immediately
- 2 **wandering:** thinking of one thing then another
- 3 **commute:** travel to work every day
- 4 **lapwing:** type of bird
- 5 **whistle:** high sound made by blowing between your lips



2 Hearing the news



At 6.45, I left the house and walked down the road to the center of the village. Saltley is a small place. There's an old church, two pubs, a post office, a grocer's and a couple of other general shops.

It's home to about 1000 people—half of them work on the nearby farms and the other half commute³ to the nearest big city to work. And right in the middle of the small square in the center of Saltley stands the Market Cross, which is a well-known meeting-place for everyone from the area.

I said hello to several people I knew as I walked over to sit on the steps at the base of the stone cross.

Soon I heard Mike's familiar lapwing⁴ whistle⁵, and saw him standing on the other side of the road. I walked over.

"Hi, Mike. What's this about?" I asked at once.

"Just wait a moment until we're away from the crowd and I'll tell you," he answered mysteriously.

We walked over to the church yard and sat on one of the benches.

"So?" I asked again.

"Oooh, you're so impatient!" he joked, but I could tell that he was excited, too.