

## The Norfolk cranes' story on BBC Countryfile

In January 2016, I had call from a BBC Countryfile researcher. They were planning a programme based in the Broads and were wondering about something on cranes. The most useful thing I told them about, I think, was the archive footage of cranes available from the RSPB's Film Unit. John Buxton's film of cranes in the early days had been digitised by Nick Upton. Added to that were interviews with John himself that had featured in the crane films made by Nick (see 'Cranes on Film' on [www.norfolkcranes.co.uk/links.htm](http://www.norfolkcranes.co.uk/links.htm)).

I met producer Ben Harris and the camera operator (I failed to note her name) on 19 January. The rendezvous was at Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Hickling nature reserve, which was also to feature in the programme, so there was a chance for chat with NWT warden John Blackburn first: the reserve and John B were also featured in the programme. Coincidentally, on the way to Hickling I drove past two cranes east of the road on the marshes on the right hand side of the road east of Acle, so a good distance from their core area at Horsey and Hickling.

That part of the recce went well, including a boat trip with John and a view over the area from the Tower Hide, accompanied by the regular sound of bugling cranes, though they weren't showing well.

Next stop was Horsey Hall, where the Countryfile team had arranged to meet John's son Robin Buxton. Robin wasn't expecting me. But I think he was reassured by my presence, knowing that John was happy how his story had been told in the book. It made me realise how little I knew Robin: we'd often had brief words in passing at Horsey Hall when I was visiting John to work on the book, but little more. I was struck by how he was a chip-off-the-block: he emphasised that Horsey was a private estate with a locked gates policy, much as John would have done.



The penny dropped that access to Horsey to film was far from a done deal before that meeting. But Ben was persuasive about their good intentions to tell John's story in the piece, and Robin agreed. Once on site, Robin couldn't have been more helpful as we went out onto the marshes, showing us the various compact hides, the private 'scrape' area and other filming opportunities. I wasn't sure if I would be needed, given Robin's local knowledge, but it was agreed that I would help to tell the story. It was all arranged and we were to be back here at 8 a.m. on 28 January.

Thursday 28 January was bright and very cold – but ideal conditions, apart from cold toes even with three pairs of socks. We all looked a bit like the Michelin Man on account of wearing several layers of clothing. One person who saw the programme thought I'd put on weight! The red fleece I wore was partly as it's my warmest, but also to provide a splash of colour for TV. I've never been persuaded of the need for camouflage clothing, and with a group of us walking, talking and filming, disturbing cranes was never an issue.

Through much of the morning, several cranes were calling and flying around, skeins of pink-footed geese came over, marsh harriers and barn owls showed well. Even if you didn't know the cranes' story you could sense it was a special place.

Ellie Harrison was the Countryfile presenter, and she was every bit as charming in person as on screen. She was happy to talk about being pregnant with her third child, before it was more widely announced (e.g. [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/12197921/Countryfile-presenter-Ellie-Harrison-pregnant-with-third-child.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/12197921/Countryfile-presenter-Ellie-Harrison-pregnant-with-third-child.html)).

Filming locations were worked out, and how the story would be told in them, and away we went. Of course there was some filming that didn't get used in the final piece: for example, they filmed a typical Countryfile meet-and-greet with me, and that wasn't used. Several of the interviews were

done while walking, and just about all were done three times. That can be tricky, making it sound fresh and like the first time each time while been 'shot' from a different angle, but somehow it seemed to work.

There was one brief hiatus just as we started to film when I noticed that both Ellie and I were sporting Swarovski binoculars. It was just a coincidence but suggested that this looked too much like product placement and the producer agreed.



Fortunately I had lent my spare pair of binoculars to the camera operator, and she was nearby filming wildlife and landscapes while the interviews were being captured. So we swapped, and look closely in the film and you'll I have my old RSPB-branded binoculars around my neck.

It was all wrapped up by late morning. I went for a walk to Horsey Mere and the Countryfile crew moved on to film the next piece at Hickling.

The programme was broadcast on 14 February 2016 and repeated on BBC2 on 21/22 February. Judging by my inbox, it was certainly seen widely in the Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays network.

The most important thumbs up for me, though, was when Bridget Buxton, John's widow, phoned to say how much she'd liked the Countryfile programme and how we had told John's story.

Chris Durdin

Cranes on Countryfile is on YouTube here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XW114eznmY&feature=youtu.be>



Grazing marsh at Horsey on the day of filming.