

*folkonwight*

## **Island Folk History**

**Adapted from *Cock & Bull Stories: Animals in Isle of Wight Folklore, Dialect and Cultural History* (2008), by Alan R Phillips**

### **INTRODUCTION**



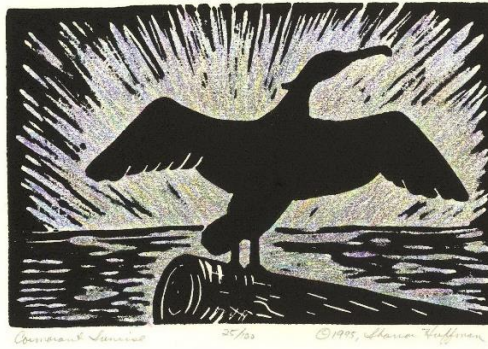
The aim of this publication has been to gather together a selection of references to animals, birds and insects which have featured in Island folklore, cultural tradition, dialect and place-names. The result is a very mixed bag culled from many different sources, ranging from dialect stories and individual words to the leisure pursuits of royalty, from oral reminiscences to folklore snippets and place-name origins. Some were first recorded a very long time ago, others have only recently made it into print, whilst a few have never been recorded at all in any formal sense.

The material readily available for various kinds of species varies widely. Medieval references centre round deer-hunting, owing to its royal connections, and rabbit-breeding, for which the Island became noted; hares, like their real-life equivalent, are a bit more elusive. Sheep, pig and cattle farming have been so integral to the Island's economy and cultural life that references abound right up to modern times, including a large variety of dialect words (something which does not apply to deer, and surprisingly little to rabbits). We should also not be surprised that an agricultural economy so dependent on horses should produce such a nostalgic set of memories as have been recorded in recent years, by the last generation that is able to do so: a selection has been included with their authors' permission in addition to an extensive set of dialect survivals.

Despite, perhaps because of, their familiarity, references to cats and dogs have been spasmodic and quirky, but a large range of the most popular birds are very well represented in folklore, dialect and place-names; so too, more unexpectedly, are a large variety of insects. The rat, that ever-present vermin threat, also fares surprisingly well. Badgers and squirrels, however, especially given the latter's prominence in the Island's contemporary cultural life, did not initially produce much readily available material but a dogged pursuit eventually yielded a range of tales and snippets.

A primary aim has been to give some of the dialect and place-name material, already extant in the form of dictionaries and lists, a more cohesive narrative. The research has been reliant for dialect entries on W.H. Long's classic *Dictionary of the Isle of Wight Dialect* (1886), supplemented by Charles Roach Smith's *Isle of Wight Words* (1881) and Edward Turner's *Encyclopaedia of Isle of Wight Words* (1900), and now updated a century later by Jack Lavers' excellent *Dictionary of Isle of Wight Dialect* (1988). Place-name etymologies are mostly taken from A.D. Mills' *The Place-Names of the Isle of Wight* (1996), which in turn updates the Swedish scholar Helge Kokeritz's pioneering work published in 1940 that carries the same title.

Historically animals have been of central importance to the lives of Isle of Wight inhabitants, especially until the retreat of agriculture in the middle of the last century. Animal husbandry was long a major source of food production, and the wealth of surviving dialect material in particular serves to highlight the integration of Islanders' day-to-day lives with those of their livestock. Wildlife had always been a target for the sportsman and poacher alike, and whilst several practices which once passed for popular entertainment such as cock-fighting or bull-baiting would not be condoned today, it should be remembered that, whilst the upper classes were able to indulge their hunting pursuits, before the advent of modern transport working people had few alternative avenues for amusement. There was furthermore a constant threat to folks' welfare and well-being posed by animals regarded as pests and disease carriers, whilst the Island was no exception in terms of the quirky English relationship with animals regarded as pets.



**Cormorant linocut. Courtesy of printmaker Sharron Huffman**

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