

## Getting out of your comfort zone

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When I think about conservation and the challenges we face, the two traits that Barry discusses this week – being values-led and courageous – really resonate with me. If we genuinely want to make a difference, to work for change, then they are essential. But, don't be fooled, it isn't always easy. It often involves making hard decisions, and perhaps most importantly, pushing ourselves out of our comfort zones. I would argue that its only when we do that, that it is possible to make truly meaningful change for ourselves, our organisations, and most important of all, for Nature itself. Let me explain.

A few years ago, I went to see Barry because, to be honest, I was struggling. On the face of it I had a great job at Rutland Water – managing the Rutland Osprey Project and other conservation projects at the nature reserve. The team I had working for me were fantastic and we had also built up a team of volunteers who were equally dedicated. However, there were frustrations – which I won't go into now – and I was also getting behind in writing up the PhD which I had been working on in whatever spare time I had. Barry told me I needed to take control of the situation. With this in mind, I went to see my boss to discuss it with him. He was very supportive and allowed me to take a sabbatical in order to finish my PhD. I did that and six months later I was well on the way to finishing my thesis. More importantly, the break from my day-to-day work had given me space to think. It would have been very easy to go back to my job at Rutland Water – a place I love – and wait for other opportunities to arise; but something told me that was the easy option. I felt I needed to do more.

So, after discussing it with Barry I made the difficult decision to hand in my notice, and to try something different: to work as a self-employed conservationist. This, I felt, would give me the freedom to develop two of my real passions – to carry out further species reintroduction projects – and to set-up the Osprey Leadership Foundation. I spoke to Roy Dennis about working with his Foundation on a freelance basis and asked Barry if he would chair the Osprey Leadership Foundation. I'm delighted that both said yes!

I knew it wouldn't be easy and many people were surprised when I handed my notice in at Rutland Water – I think there were some who felt I would spend the rest of my career there – but I knew it was the right decision to make. Having said that I was now well and truly out of my comfort zone. Roy was very supportive but said I needed to find my own funding; meanwhile setting-up a new charity was full of bureaucratic headaches, and far more work than I had naively expected.

The two-and-a-half years since I set out on this new journey certainly haven't been easy, but have been incredibly rewarding. In summer 2017 Roy, myself and the conservation charity Birds of Poole Harbour began the second English Osprey translocation in Dorset. Then in April this year, together with Forestry England, we were granted a licence to reintroduce White-tailed Eagles to the South Coast. There have been many challenges and ups and downs along the way, and the eagle project, in particular, has proved to be a huge amount of work. But I shouldn't be surprised at this: making positive change isn't easy. What I do know is that when we released the first young eagles on the Isle of Wight early one August morning, I had an immense sense of pride that I had contributed towards returning these iconic birds to England. I am also thrilled that the Osprey Leadership Foundation is now up and running, thanks in no small part to our wonderful Programme Manager Becky Park who I was able to temp to join us from Rutland Water.

I'm sorry if this has been a rather self-indulgent blog this week, but I just wanted to emphasise the importance of pushing ourselves out of our comfort zones. As I mentioned in the first week of the programme, one of the values that my time at Rutland Water has instilled in me is the importance of

being proactive. Two-and-a-half years ago I knew that the only way I knew I could stay true to that value was to be courageous and to push myself out of my own comfort zone – which was leaving my job at Rutland Water. I remember seeing a quote at the time that really resonated:

“If we wait until we’re ready we’ll be waiting for the rest of our lives.”

So, if there is something nagging away at you, that thing that you wish you had always done, or a change you think you need to make, then my advice would be to go for it. You never know where pushing yourself out of your comfort zone might lead.