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The Cambridge Union Society
9A Bridge Street
Cambridge, CB2 1UB

Email : pressofficer@cus.org

PRESS RELEASE –10.02.15**Bill Oddie**

On the evening of 10th February 2015, comedian, actor, ornithologist, author and presenter Bill Oddie spoke to members of the Cambridge Union.

He opened his interview in good humour, joking that he feels "out of date" now as most people remember him for his work with wildlife rather than his previous career in comedy. Despite this, he good-naturedly answered the question of what his favourite bird is, telling the audience that it is the swallow because of its miraculous migratory habits.

He explained that he became interested in birds through egg-collecting, a common hobby for children at the time he was growing up; he recounted a story from his childhood of coming across a cuckoo's egg in a hedge-sparrow's nest entirely by chance. Bill Oddie described nature as his passion in much the way that music can be a passion for others, and rejected ideas that one should need to lay out exactly why it is important, saying "it matters because it matters".

He joked about his conflict surrounding receiving his OBE after the systematic mocking of the OBE that had taken place in *I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again*. He still managed to find amusement at the ceremony though, regaling us with the story of how he forgot that one is not meant to turn the back on the Queen, and he ended up doing a pirouette in front of her to correct himself.

Questions from the floor brought out his favourite place to go bird-watching, which he said in the UK was the Farne Islands in June or July -- even though he described puffins as a " clichéd " bird! He said that his fascination with migration had also made Central Park, New York at dawn in May an amazing experience, as birds were "cascading out the sky", travelling from Southern and Central America to Canada.

He responded with classic good humour to the mention of the urban myth that he had trained homing pigeons to smuggle drugs, and also to a question about why he had never worked on *Monty Python*, explaining that there was a general feeling that the type of comedy he wrote, particularly his style of comic song, would not fit with the show. He did describe comedy groups as being like football teams, however, with members frequently being transferred from one to another.

The other large segment of Bill Oddie's talk was discussion of mental health. He spoke very openly about his experiences with bipolar disorder. He did not shy away from the difficulty in identifying it, and criticised the tendency of modern medicine to overlook family history when diagnosing illnesses. When asked about how his employers had responded to his illness, he said that whilst they gave a show of being ready to accept any new ideas he may, in reality this is not how the BBC works, and they had never come back to him following his being removed from the *Springwatch* team.

The variety of things Bill Oddie was prepared to talk about appealed to the diverse interests of the attendees, and his humour throughout gave a friendly atmosphere to the Chamber.

By Helen Dallas

Co-Head of Press, Lent 2015