

Welcome

Name: Thomas Fowler

PhD: Archaeology

Thesis Title: Faunal and Cultural Invasions: zooarchaeological and linguistic perspectives on the Easter 'Bunny'

Thesis Description:

Today in Britain non-native fauna are often described as 'invasive' and considered threats to the biodiversity of our natural environment - indeed the language used in these debates echoes that of right-wing politics. Fauna introduced in the deep-past, however, are considered fundamental to our natural and cultural heritage.

This is an example of shifting baselines, a concept from sociology that describes the trend for cultural phenomena, people, flora and fauna with which an individual grows up to be considered natural and morally absolute, whilst those introduced later in one's life are "wrong" or even dangerous. Shifting baselines thereby create a form of 'received wisdom' which informs everything from our wider worldview of people, animals and traditions to conservation and biodiversity policy making, with no appreciation of deep-time evidence.

Easter presents an opportunity to explore these ideas using multiple deep-time perspectives as very little is known about its history. We do know, however, that not only is it not native to Britain but also likely had non-Christian origins. Nevertheless, it is today the most important event in the Christian calendar and also a hugely significant secular festival. The histories of the non-native brown hare (*Lepus europaeus*), rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) and chicken (*Gallus gallus*), all associated with Easter, are similarly poorly understood, though they are an essential part of the modern celebration and of wider British culture and environment.

This project attempts to investigate the cultural history the brown hare and rabbit from their introduction to Britain to their eventual role in the development of Easter traditions and the image of the Easter 'Bunny'. By improving zooarchaeological approaches to identifying hare and rabbit remains using comparative and osteometric techniques the project will refine archaeological understanding of the chronology and circumstances of these species' introduction and spread. By integrating the osteological evidence with artefactual and linguistic (place-name) data using GIS, I will examine how these animals spread as living features of British landscapes, agents in human-animal interactions and as conceptual figures influencing human thought, worldview and traditions.



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My PhD forms part of the **Exploring the Easter E.g.** project.

PI: Naomi Sykes (University of Exeter)

Co-Is: Philip Shaw (University of Leicester), Greger Larson (University of Oxford)

Twitter: [@AHRCEasterEg](https://twitter.com/AHRCEasterEg)

Website: <http://www.easter-origins.org/>

Supervisors and Institution(s):

Hannah O'Regan - University of Nottingham

Philip Shaw - University of Leicester

Publications

Malene Lauritsen, Richard Allen, Joel M. Alves, Carly Ameen, [Tom Fowler](#), Evan Irving-Pease, Greger Larson, Luke John Murphy, Alan K. Outram, Esther Pilgrim, Philip A. Shaw & Naomi Sykes (2018): Celebrating Easter, Christmas and their associated alien fauna, *World Archaeology*, DOI: [10.1080/00438243.2018.1515655](https://doi.org/10.1080/00438243.2018.1515655)

Roberts J, [Fowler T](#), Sheeran L, Reynolds R, Fox T, Bowen F, Sykes N. 2017. Animal bone. In *The moated medieval manor and Tudor royal residence at Woking Palace: Excavations between 2009 and 2015*. R Poulton (ed.). SpoilHeap Monograph **16**. Surrey County Archaeological Unit: Woking, 164-175.

Scholarly / Public Engagement Activities:

CDFs

2018 - Digital Arts & Humanities Summer School (DAHSS) 2018 - Midlands3Cities/South West & Wales joint funded project

2017 - 'Put Your Maps to Work': Introduction to ArcGIS (10.3) - 2nd Edition

Conferences & Outreach:

02/12/2017 - Association for Environmental Archaeology (AEA) Autumn Conference, "Grand Challenge Agendas in Environmental Archaeology". University of Edinburgh. The *Easter E.g. Changing Perceptions of Cultural and Biological "Aliens"*

15/10/2017 - International Council for Archaeozoology (ICAZ) Archaeozoology, Genetics and Morphometrics (AGM) Working Group, University of Liverpool: *The Easter E.g. - Changing Perceptions of Cultural and Biological "Aliens"*

17/06/2017 - Professional Zooarchaeology Group (PZG), Cardiff University: *Exploring the Easter E.g. - Introducing the 'Easter Project'*

16/05/2017 - Change: Archaeological Evidence for Socio-political, Cultural and Physical Transitions, University of Nottingham Post-graduate Archaeology Conference: *Bio-cultural 'aliens': Exploring the history of the Easter 'Bunny'*

12/04/2017 - BBC Radio Nottingham - discussing the origins of Easter

Feb 2017 - Young Natural History Scientists' Meeting (YNHM) 2017: Poster presentation, Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris

18/11/2016 - Being Human Festival of the Humanities: *Extinctions! Invasions! The wild side of hopes and fears*, Oxford University Museum of Natural History, Oxford.

Positions held:

Student Representative, [Association for Environmental Archaeology](#) (2-year term, December 2017-19)

Professional memberships:

- Association for Environmental Archaeology

Other Research Interests:

- Osteometrics
- Birds
- Small mammals
- Iron Age, Romano-British, Anglo-Saxon and Medieval archaeology
- Place-names and linguistics
- Landscape
- Animals in folklore
- Statistics, GIS and programming in (zoo)archaeology
- Digital outreach, research and teaching