



# Jules Hudson

## COUNTRY ESCAPE

For many the arrival of the Canada Geese is a sad reminder summer's at an end. For Jules – and his beloved labrador Iolo – it signals the start of his favourite season

**T**he sun was setting over to the west, and my day in the garden was coming to an end. Hours had happily passed mowing, pruning, burning and grafting. Tired, filthy, yet happy in the warm glow of a day having achieved a lot, I called out for our black labrador Iolo. It was time for our evening stroll before supper and a warm fire.

The fields of wheat that swayed and surrounded us just a few weeks ago have gone, and now for a short while we're enjoying swathes of open stubble across which we now walk and explore. Corners of fields long inaccessible are now easy to reach. Ahead of me Iolo is hunting, crossing his tracks, head to the floor, sniffing and seeking traces of our neighbouring wildlife. Foxes, badgers, rabbits and even deer. For a busy three-year-old dog, there's a lot to take in.

But then we stop. As we crest the golden ridge we stumble across a mighty gathering that brings a huge smile. It's the geese! Hundreds of Canada Geese are grazing ahead. As soon as we appear, the noise rises to fill the 40-acre field. We stop, and we crouch, and we both sit for a while and watch, revelling in a moment in time. The years come and go, but there are few things quite so magical to me as the day when, for whatever reason, you sense that you're witnessing the threshold of a changing season. It's like closing one door only to open another, and the door we've just opened is autumn's.

I love years when the seasons are defined, just as I love to watch weather cross the valley below us. This year as a whole has been pretty good, once we escaped the clutches of the winter deluge, and the harvest has been fantastic. But now it's time to draw ourselves in, to prepare for the winter, and rediscover that cosy feeling that only the oldest of jumpers and smokiest of bonfires can conjure. Autumn and the transition to it is one of my favourite times of year, and it's signalled not just by the turning of the leaves or the ploughing in of the stubble. For Iolo and I it's also heralded by the cacophonous racket of our visiting geese.

You may well recall earlier ramblings where I have laid bare Iolo's penchant

for chasing our chickens or catching the odd geriatric pheasant, yet to my surprise he's never taken anything other than a passing interest in the geese. Maybe it's because he's daunted by their sheer number; maybe he knows he'd come off worse if they all really thought he was a potential threat; or maybe, like me, he's so taken with their sudden appearance that he feels he wants to take it all in before they leave as quickly as they arrived.

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Of course in many parts of the country these days Canada Geese are seen as pests, and are subjected to culling. But not here. I've become very fond of their stealthy appearance and rather secretive departure, and they are now part of our local calendar. I'm happy that our noisy and frantic visitors are left untroubled by our annual bout of excited curiosity. Some might think their appearance should signal a sadness that the best of the year is now over, but for me autumn is just the beginning; the world is preparing itself for next summer.

I do not know where our regular flock has come from anymore than I know where it is going. It seems rude to ask somehow. But one thing is certain. Their next stop will be winter. I'll see you there.

• *Black Sheep is away*

**JULES HUDSON** was born in Essex but stayed in Wales after studying archaeology at Lampeter University. He has worked in television since 1996 and is a member of the *Countryfile* team, but is best-known as the leading face of *Escape To The Country*. He moved back across the Border in 2012, to Herefordshire.

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