

<b>Institution:</b> University of Winchester		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27 English Language and Literature		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Impact of the importance of sound for our understanding of the experience of animals in early medieval England		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2012-present		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Eric Lacey	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Senior Lecturer in English Language	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> September 2012-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016-present		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Lacey's research has transformed how we understand and recreate human interactions with animals in early medieval England:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Impact on Ubisoft's <i>Assassin's Creed Valhalla</i></b> The Assassin's Creed franchise is one of the best-selling video game franchises of all time. Lacey's research helped developers make the game "as immersive as possible... [and] this immersion is central to our franchise".</li> <li>• <b>Impact on public understanding</b> Lacey's informed the Penguin Monarchs biography of <i>Athelstan</i>. His article in the <i>BBC History Magazine</i> inspired a series of secondary school classes.</li> <li>• <b>Impact on heritage practice</b> Lacey's research on falconry informed the understanding of heritage professionals, teachers and the public. For example, historical re-enactors have changed the way they present British heritage at sites like West Stow.</li> </ul>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The underpinning research all relates to how birds were perceived and used – symbolically as well as literally – in the early medieval period, with a marked focus on early medieval England. Research was undertaken between 2012 to 2020, beginning when Lacey joined the University as an hourly-paid lecturer and persisting through his appointment to lecturer (2015) and senior lecturer (2019).</p> <p>Despite taking a variety of interdisciplinary approaches (semantics and archaeology in <b>3.1</b>; cognitive anthropology and historical linguistics in <b>3.2</b>; Old English, Middle Welsh, Old Norse and Latin literature and semantics in <b>3.3</b>; philosophy and cognitive semantics in <b>3.4</b>, and history, landscape archaeology and onomastics in <b>3.5</b>), Lacey's research has consistently demonstrated the need for recovering perceptual modes and experiences (rather than anachronistically imposing present-day sensory experiences upon the past), and sought to articulate how the differences between medieval and present-day cognition have implications for how birds were used symbolically and practically. Lacey has also placed particular focus on the importance of names and naming, and how these lie at the intersection of quotidian lived experience and more elaborate literary, religious, and cultural constructions.</p> <p>Lacey's research, as a whole, simultaneously addressed two lacunae in extant scholarship. On the one hand, no significant research into birds in the early medieval period had been undertaken between Charles Whitman's slim study in 1898 (<i>Birds of Old English Literature</i>) and</p>		

the last decade. Since then, there has been some modest interest in the topic, such as Michael Warren's poetry-focused and eco-critical monograph (*Birds in Medieval English Poetry*) in 2018 and a slew of book chapters and journal articles, which have drawn upon Lacey's foundational work in issues of naming, cognition, and their literary and cultural significance. On the other hand, there was – across several disciplines – a general tendency to tacitly impose modern assumptions about species, the primacy of sight, and clean-cut divisions between the supernatural and the natural. Lacey demonstrated the importance of aurality in day-to-day existence in early medieval England (3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4), where in many cases it was the primary means of perception. Birds were often heard and not seen, or seen before they were heard, or characterised by their sounds rather than their appearances. Early medieval English texts frequently describe the sounds of birds at length, but rarely their appearance, and most bird names derive from their sounds rather than from their physical characteristics (3.4). Lacey demonstrates how integral this aural experience of birds was to peoples' perceptions of space and place (3.1), to their experience of literary birds (3.3), and even the extent to which visually similar species were differentiated by being primarily experienced aurally (3.2, 3.4).

In addition to this, Lacey has shown the ways in which culturally held superstitions, such as the appearance of eagles, ravens and wolves around those who will die, are grounded in historically observed behaviour of these animals adapting to human interactions with their environments (such as learning that people donning armour precedes the production of carcasses at battle sites, 3.3).

Lacey places central concern on the importance of names, not only for what they say about how people perceived animals (e.g. what features – or noises – they are named after, 3.1, 3.2, 3.4), but also what names can tell us about the use and interaction with these animals. His research into hawk and falcon names in the landscape has drawn attention to how place-names fossilise information about early human-animal interaction, such as places where falcons and hawks were caught, or used for hunting, and how reading the distribution of these names alongside the textual sources points to falconry being practiced not only by aristocracy, but for subsistence hunting by lower classes in society (3.5).

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- 3.1. Poole, K., and Lacey, E. (2014) 'Avian Aurality in Anglo-Saxon England'. *World Archaeology* 46:3. 400-415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00438243.2014.909104>
- 3.2. Lacey, E. (2015) 'When is a *hroc* not a *hroc*? When it is a *crawe* or *hrefn*!: A Case-Study in Recovering Old English Taxonomies'. In: M. Boulton, J. Hawkes and M. Herman (eds) *The Art, Literature and Material Culture of the Medieval World*. Dublin: Four Courts. pp. 138-152. Submitted in REF2.
- 3.3. Lacey, E. (2015) 'Beowulf's Blithe-hearted Raven'. In: M. Bintley and T. Williams (eds) *Representing Beasts in Early Medieval England and Scandinavia*. Woodbridge: Boydell. pp. 113-130. Submitted in REF2.
- 3.4. Lacey, E. (2016) 'Birds and Words: Aurality, Semantics and Species in Anglo-Saxon England'. In: S. Thomson and M. Bintley (eds) *Sensory Perception in the Medieval World: Manuscripts, Texts, and other Material Matters*. Turnhout: Brepols. pp. 75-98. Submitted in REF2.
- 3.5. Lacey, E. (2019) 'The Charter Evidence for Falconry and Falcon-catching in England and Wales, c. 600 – c.1100'. In: K. Gersmann and O. Grimm (eds) *Raptor and Human – falconry and bird symbolism throughout the millennia on a global scale*. 4 volumes. Vol 3. pp. 1089-1116. Submitted in REF2.

Outputs 3.2, 3.3., 3.4 and 3.5 were assessed by external reviewers and were rated 3\* and 4\*.

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

#### Domain 1: Ubisoft – Assassin's Creed Valhalla

Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed* franchise is one of the best-selling video game franchises of all

time, comprising a catalogue of over a dozen main games and numerous spin-offs. In 2020, they will release the highly anticipated *Assassin's Creed Valhalla*, an instalment of the series which centres on Britain during the so-called 'Viking Age'. *Valhalla* sold over 1.7 million copies at launch [5.1]. Ubisoft is renowned for presenting the historical periods of their games accurately, and this is one of the unique selling points for their games. Lacey was hired as a consultant during the development of the game because his research on cognition, environment, linguistics and sound were drawn upon to make the gameplay "as immersive as possible... [and] this immersion is central to our franchise" [5.1]; this "verisimilitude" has been highlighted in subsequent reviews as a major attraction for the game [5.8, 5.9], with one reviewer stating that "[the] mediaeval place-names are a delight". Lacey's consultancy work produced two key things: a series of short interview videos, and the production of a name-generating database. The interview videos each produced a brief of some aspect of the early medieval world – from the way landscapes were experienced as much through sound as through sight [3.1, 3.4], to the sorts of animals that would have occupied the landscapes [3.2, 3.4, 3.5], to the interconnected perception of science, magic, and religion [3.3, 3.4], to the sorts of interlinguistic contact that would have occurred [3.5] – for the development team to consult and consider as they created the game world and how players interfaced with it [5.1]. The name-generating database drew upon Lacey's expertise in name elements and their etymology [3.2, 3.4, 3.5] to produce a tool that could create a variety of different names for animals, people, objects, and places that occur in the game-world [5.1].

### **Domain 2: Animals, Superstition, and Public History**

Lacey's research has had a cultural impact in shifting public perception of understanding of the natural world in the so-called 'dark ages'. It has stressed the experiential and empirical bases for medieval knowledge and drawn particular attention to the ways in which superstitions about certain animals – especially a widespread belief in the prophetic abilities of the raven, eagle and wolf, the 'beasts of battle' – were grounded in observed behaviour of these creatures as they learned, for example, to follow bands of armed and armoured men [3.1, 3.2, 3.3]. A TV-presenter and popular historian wrote an accessible biography of Athelstan. The author stated that they reframed its narrative of the events preceding the *Battle of Brunanburh* to include these superstitious elements in light of Lacey's research [5.2], and the natural basis underpinning these beliefs formed the centrepiece of Lacey's impact activities with the BBC.

For BBC History, Lacey first gave a talk, attended by 33 members of the public, on the 'beasts of battle' at the BBC History Weekend in Winchester in October 2018 [5.3], and then published this as a 1,000 word article entitled 'Anglo-Saxon Beasts of Death' in *BBC History Magazine's* January 2019 issue. The contents had some impact on education, as a secondary school teacher emailed Lacey off the back of this article requesting permission to use the article as the basis for a series of year 7, 8, and 9 classes on early medieval superstition [5.4]. The classes were positively received, with students expressing particular surprise at the ways animals had adapted to take advantage of the ways people dressed and behaved on their way to battle.

### **Domain 3: Public Understanding of Falconry**

Lacey's research on falconry [3.5] has had a cultural impact in the way the public has understood the murky past of British falconry and has modified the way in which historical re-enactors have performed their jobs at heritage sites like West Stow. He presented his research on the way in which Norse, Welsh, Irish and English speakers engaged in capturing and trading falcons to the public on two occasions: firstly at a collaborative commemorative event on the millennial of Cnut organised jointly between UCL, the University of Winchester, and Hampshire Cultural Trust, and secondly at the London Anglo-Saxon Symposium (LASS), held at Senate House in March 2017. The millennial of Cnut event was attended by over 200 people from eight different countries [5.5], including diplomats, teachers, professionals in the heritage sector and interested members of public. The attendees at LASS included historical re-enactors, curators, and librarians [5.7]. A pair of re-enactors from West Stow commented on how Lacey's talk here led to them altering the way they presented falconry at their recreated Anglo-Saxon settlement, shifting focus away from trade with the Continent and onto how the practice spread from England to the rest of Britain. They were surprised at the way in which Lacey showed falconry as not just the preserve of the elite, but also

the occupation of lower social classes, and have included this in their day-to-day re-enactments at West Stow [5.8]

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

**5.1.** Written testimony of representative of the Editorial Research Unit on *Assassin's Creed Valhalla*

**5.2.** Written testimony of TV presenter and popular historian.

**5.3.** Paper survey taken at the Winchester History Weekend talk

**5.4.** Written testimony of representative of Millennium High School

**5.5.** Enrolment data for, and questionnaire responses from, participants at the *Æthelred II and Cnut the Great. A Millennial Conference to Commemorate the Siege of London in 1016*. 6-9 July 2016, held by the organisers (Dr Erin Goeres, UCL, Professor Richard North, UCL, Dr Eric Lacey, University of Winchester, Dr Carolin Esser-Miles, University of Winchester, and Nick Suffolk, Hampshire Cultural Trust).

**5.6.** Questionnaire responses from participants at the *London Anglo-Saxon Symposium 2017*, taken by Lacey

**5.7.** Written testimony from historical re-enactors at West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village

**5.8.** Review of *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* by Matt Ferguson  
[[www.scholarlygamers.com/review/2020/11/09/assassins-creed-valhalla-review](http://www.scholarlygamers.com/review/2020/11/09/assassins-creed-valhalla-review)]

**5.9.** Review of *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* by Steve Boxer [www.pocket-lint.com/games/reviews/Ubisoft.154608-assassins-creed-valhalla-review-ps5-series-x]