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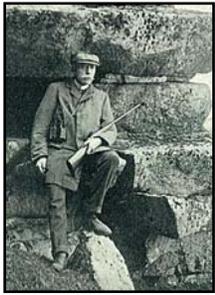
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# Bringing Scotland's wilderness 'within the reach of the people': William Eagle Clarke (1853-1938) and representations of place

Bob McGowan & Geoffrey N. Swinney, National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh

William Eagle Clarke was on the staff of the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh, (now incorporated into National Museums Scotland) from 1888 to 1921. This poster presents two related aspects of his construct of representations of Scotland's landscape.



W. E. Clarke



Dioramas in Royal Scottish Museum, c. 1954



Charles Kirk



Kirk's diorama representation of a Golden Eagle eyrie at Corrour Forest, Inverness-shire

## Wilderness as Model

Following his appointment as Keeper of Natural History in 1906, Clarke initiated the production of innovative dioramas of specific remote Scottish sites to illustrate breeding habits and behaviours of some rarer birds found at particular localities.

In collaboration with the Glasgow-based taxidermist Charles Kirk, Clarke undertook an ambitious programme to capture and represent a place and moment in time. Each display case comprised: 'The nest and sufficient portion of its actual site and surroundings with the parent birds and their eggs are combined so as to show the group as it might be seen under free and natural conditions'. The groups involved species whose breeding sites would have been unfamiliar to the general public, for example Black-throated Diver, Golden Eagle, Merlin and Snow Bunting.

Both the maps and the models, like the panoramas which so excited the interest of Charles Dickens's character Mr Booley, were technologies for 'conveying the results of actual experience to those who are unable to obtain such experiences for themselves: and to bring them within the reach of the people'.<sup>1</sup> Was Clarke seeking to encourage visits to Scotland's wild places or simply to provide a surrogate experience for town-dwellers who were unable to taste 'wilderness' first-hand?

<sup>1</sup> Dickens, C. (1850) Some account of an extraordinary traveller. *Household Words*, 20 April 1850

## Wilderness as Map

Equally pioneering was Clarke's mapping of seasonal bird migrations. Clarke and his associates mapped Scotland as a resource for its resident and migrant avifauna. He made direct observation of bird movements mainly at lighthouses on smaller islands, notably Fair Isle, thereby making use of a technology of (human) navigation, which was itself a response to the complex topography of Scotland and its coasts. His studies utilised the responses of birds to powerful lights (and particular islands) and he reconstructed migratory flight-paths using data accumulated over about 20 years. This research led him to contribute to Bartholomew's *Atlas of Zoogeography* (1911) and culminated in his seminal *Studies in Bird Migration* (1912).

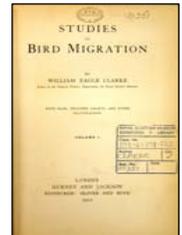
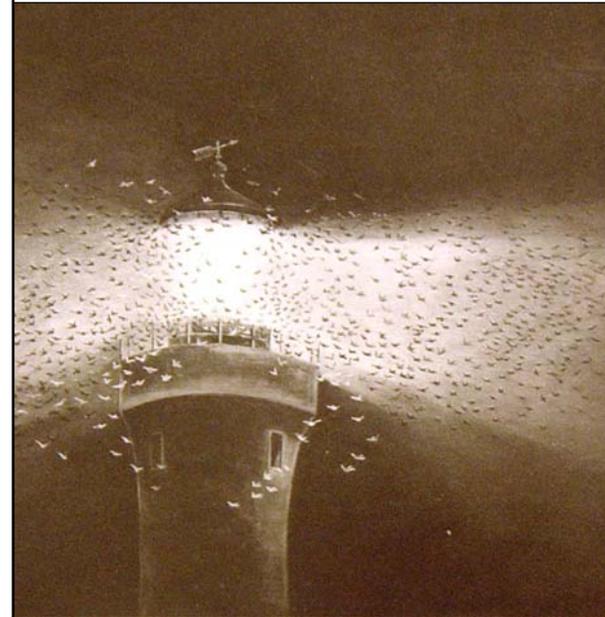


Illustration of birds at Eddystone lantern (*Studies in Bird Migration*) and Clarke's bird migration map from *Atlas of Zoogeography*

Contact details: Bob McGowan, National Museums Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1JF.  
[b.mcgowan@nms.ac.uk](mailto:b.mcgowan@nms.ac.uk)

