

## **Martin Maudsley, founding member and coordinator of Story Soup**

After completing my doctorate on population ecology of cereal aphids at the University of East Anglia, I worked for a short period at a field studies centre in Norfolk, teaching practical biology and environmental sciences to residential school groups. I really enjoyed teaching my subject to children, in particular helping A-level students set up their own field-based research projects. I then moved to Bristol to undertake a postdoctoral position at Long Ashton Research Station, investigating the ecology of farmland hedgerows. During this time I was granted a BBSRC media fellowship to work on the BBC TV programme 'Countryfile' for a period of three months. This was a great opportunity to work within the media, where I was able to identify, investigate and communicate ecological topics that had public interest, ranging from salmon farming to the BSE crisis. I also continued to play a role in presenting the work of the research station to the wider public, including schools, countryside managers and the farming community.

At the end of my four year postdoctoral appointment I followed my interest in the public understanding of science by becoming the first environmental education officer at a new science visitor centre called At-Bristol. The role included designing exhibits, running school workshops and delivering informal activities to family groups. As part of the latter task I began to use storytelling as a way of communicating ideas about the natural world. Storytelling quickly became a passion and, backed up by a part-time job as lecturer for the Open University, I left my job with At-Bristol to embark upon a new, uncertain career as a freelance storyteller.

After several years I have developed my storytelling role, having worked in lots of schools and with many different organisations including the Soil Association, Bristol Zoo, the Eden project and the National Trust. I have continued to emphasise stories about landscape and natural environments, which I myself became fascinated by through my undergraduate studies and postgraduate research. I relish the power that storytelling has, in common with science, to instil a sense of wonder about the world in young and old alike. I have recently performed a number of outdoor story walks called 'Wild Tales', where I am able to interweave folktales and folklore with ecological knowledge about plants and wildlife encountered on the walk.

The career path from science doctorate to becoming a professional storyteller is probably not usual nor was it predictable, but it undoubtedly draws on many aspects of my earlier work and is immensely enjoyable and fulfilling.