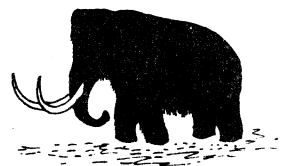
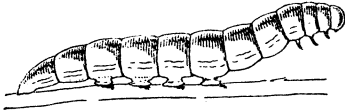


BIODIVERSITY



Biodiversity has become a key word in environmental circles since the 1992 Rio Summit - it's basically about encouraging the preservation of as varied a range of habitats and species as possible, and not only for aesthetic or economic reasons. It has since become clear that the more species that exist together in a natural environment the more chance each individual species has of prospering - including us. Unfortunately, it's rather more problematic than this now because our species has come to dominate the globe to such an extent that there are relatively few areas left, if any, where this natural phenomenon can be said to be still fully operating. We are left, in effect, with living in a world already compromised by human activity. This has been true of the British Isles for several millennia; most of the landscape has been moulded by human beings and the balance of nature altered very much in our "favour".

Turvey has no more escaped this process than any other part of Britain. Bedfordshire is, indeed, one of the least wooded and most intensively farmed of our counties. Nonetheless the diversity we have, although poor by tropical standards, is still remarkable and a cause for celebration. It is still possible, for example, to see up to seventy species of breeding birds within five or six miles of Turvey. This richness owes a great deal to the presence of the river valley habitats and the scattered fragments of woodland, especially those to the north and west of Harrold and Odell. A visit to Harrold Country Park will readily confirm that the river valley can and does provide suitable habitat for a wide range of species, including kingfisher, common tern, grey, pied and yellow wagtails, up to eight species of warbler, lapwing and heron, and several species of waterfowl. A visit to Odell Great Wood can be similarly exciting, with all our resident tits and woodpeckers, nuthatch and treecreeper, sparrowhawk and kestrel, and the possibility nearby still of nightingale and tree sparrow, both of which have declined dramatically elsewhere.

Such declines have always been part of the natural process but the 1992 Summit was especially concerned because we seem to be undergoing a period of exceptional decline which can be directly attributed to human activity. We are losing more species globally than at any time since the last great extinction at the end of the Pleistocene era more than ten thousand years ago, and although we have long since lost the majority of our wilderness in Britain, what plants and creatures we have are still in decline. Again, Turvey still does quite well in this respect: our farmland, for example, which is one of the most threatened habitats, still has skylarks, grey and red-legged partridge, yellowhammers, linnets and goldfinches, but all are increasingly thinly scattered, and corn bunting seem to have gone altogether. We haven't reached the stage where a walk in the countryside produces nothing but wood pigeons, but there is no room for complacency. A visit to parts of Norfolk or Cambridgeshire will soon reveal that what we still have is precious and worth hanging on to, and whatever the scientific reasons for doing so - and these are serious enough - I can vouch that birds, and wildlife in general, are definitely "good for the soul".



Br. John

