

## All change : Reflections on the past Fourteen Years in Turvey

As ever it's very difficult to remove subject bias from any musings on changes in the world of natural history. The landscape looks much the same with a few more houses here and there. Have real changes taken place or am I simply looking at things differently now, knowing where to find creatures and plants which missed me before? This year, for example, Hares have been really hard to come by but Foxes seem to be all over the place. Last year it was the Kestrels which were well down in number while Sparrowhawks, Hobbies and Buzzards were much the same as the year before. So, with observer bias in mind, here are some of the changes which seem to be 'for real'.

Cormorants on the river. Fourteen years ago there were a few, and these largely in winter. But now they are with us all the year round and in much larger numbers. Well over 100 now attend the roost at Harrold Country Park in some winters and over thirty pairs now breed there. Breeding was first noticed only as recently as 1997. Is it any coincidence that fish stocks have fallen?

Buzzards everywhere! In 1991 I saw one Buzzard only, and again only one in 1992, and both these birds occurred at migration times and seemed to be on the move. Now it is not unusual to see six or more birds in a day, and over 100 in a year. Several pairs now seem well established locally, and are probably breeding. For the first time Buzzards outnumbered Kestrels last year as the commonest raptor.

Fewer Finches? In some cases this is certainly so. It is now an event to see large flocks of finches, sparrows or buntings. Where once they were so numerous as not to be considered worth counting now any flock of these birds in double, let alone treble, figures is worth recording. Much depends on the crop being grown. Pheasant cover can sometimes attract an interesting mix - over 100 Linnet were recently present just beyond Abbey Park with 50+ Chaffinch, and a few Greenfinch and Yellowhammer. House Sparrows and Tree Sparrows have plummeted but may be stabilising now, small flocks of the latter are now being found to the north of Turvey. Starlings too have suffered a drastic decline. Goldfinches, however, seem to be bucking the trend, perhaps because of the milder winters - 140 were present by Abbey Farm in September 2004.

Insect variations Insects are definitely down in number despite the warmer summers and one species of butterfly has gone altogether.

It's several years now since I last saw a Wall butterfly locally. Some butterflies, such as the Holly Blue, have a cycle of abundance and scarcity which makes it difficult to perceive a general trend, but 1996<sup>was</sup> a peak year for butterflies both in terms of numbers and variety. and has yet to be surpassed. This is true also for moths - we had several excellent 'catches' last year, of 200+ individuals, but nothing like 1996. The variety does however seem to be holding up and many species are occurring much earlier than in previous years, including a Humming-bird hawkmoth on 1st April 2004. Several species of insect are also increasing their range, perhaps also because of the general warming-up, including Hornets, which are now abundant around the Abbey, and another large species of wasp with the imposing Latin name 'Dolichovespula media' - it has more black than yellow on its abdomen.

Perhaps enough said for the time being.