

Global Warming And the Wildlife

We are constantly hearing of this global warming every day and every time a so-called rarity in the wild bird world appears it is due to this Global Warming, well one has only to read in the natural history books of 200 years or so ago on the British Resident and Migratory Birds due to the fact they were food for the nation on a commercial basis, anything in those days which had flesh on its bones was good for the table, and when reduced in numbers by this trade they became a rarity and were then pursued by collectors for both bird and eggs until they were driven out of the country or made extinct within it, I now quote from the book, Lincolnshire and the Fens, chapter "The Wealth of Wild Life."

"Those who like Eels and look in vain for them in fishmonger's Shops, will regret the passing of the days when rents paid in the Manor of Ely (the name means "eel-district") included 3,036 sticks of eels, and a further 14,500 eels in Lent, The Monks of Ramsey, before the Conquest, were receiving each year 60,000 eels from one fenland manor, and the other rivers of Lincolnshire and of the Isle of Axholme were no less fruitful.

The meres and dikes were also the home of water-birds in numbers that the twentieth century can scarcely conceive, In the Middle Ages they must of formed part of the diet of common folk, as well as finding their way by purchase and gift, or as customary, to the tables of the rich, In the sixteenth century the household of the Earl of Northumberland in East Yorkshire consumed not only wild fowl such as Mallard, Teal and Widgeon, but also Seagulls and Terns, and a great variety of birds of the seashore and marsh, Plovers, Curlews, Bustards, Cranes, Reeves, Bitterns, Knots, Dotterels, Stints, Seapyes (Oyster-catchers) Redshanks and Shollards (Spoonbills) birds that some of us have never seen and none have eaten, some of the supplies consumed at Wressle and Leconfield may of come from the Isle of Axholme and the Humberside.

In Elizabeth's reign, the corporation of Lincoln presented the Lord Treasurer with one dozen Godwits, five dozen Knots and a dozen Pewits. In the past two centuries so much destruction of wildlife has gone on in Europe and North America, and to a lesser extent in the other continents, that it has reduced some species to extinction, and others to a rarity that makes observing and photographing them an esoteric sport. In no part of the world has man reduced wildlife more drastically than in the Fens. The Ruff was already so rare in the 17th century that it was taken young and fattened in captivity. It fetched a high price, commercial

exploitation reached a peak in the 17th and 18th centuries, nearly all the 40 or so Decoys which once existed in this area date from that time. The best known is that at Borough Fen near Peterborough which was made in about 1670, but the greatest number was in the Friskney neighbourhood between Skegness and Boston.

The ten decoys there in the eighteenth century, before the enclosure and draining of the East Fen, are said to have sent as many as 31,000 Mallard, Widgeon and Teal to the London Market. There was a famous family of decoy-men at Friskney named Skelton. George, born about 1760, built decoys in Norfolk, Thomas his grandson died in 1918 at the age of 85. All that remains of the decoys there now are the clump of trees which surround the sites, an unexpected break in the expanse of ploughed land.

The management of a decoy, with its six or so pipes down, which the wild birds were led by decoy-ducks and driven by terriers, required a subtle skill, unlike the stupid practice of driving meres with boats in the moulting season, or in the nesting season before young birds could fly, The drainage of the Meres put a stop to the source of the supply, as it did to many other occupations."

As well as these decoys for ducks, there must have been a large number of men who made a living netting the Waders such as the above mentioned, Plovers, Godwits and Knots to supply them in the quantity required by the markets. For the Plovers this went on until around 1950 in Lincolnshire, and of course the shotgun came into its own rights about 200 years ago which helped to increase the supply, but not the quality of the netted birds due to wounds and flesh damage incurred. Also the noise of the gun gave alarm to the birds which weren't killed, making them wary in the future, unlike the nets which were silent and could make a larger number captured with one pull than one shot could kill from a gun. Also, I doubt there was any closed season for protection of breeding stock, and their eggs were collected on a commercial scale for markets and household use by country folk. The birds are now returning to the areas and habitats of their ancestors which were persecuted and became a rarity or extinct in this country almost 2 centuries ago because they are now protected and not because as some persons would like us to believe Global Warming.

As for the birds returning to Goxhill, the Marsh Harrier has nested successfully for the last 6 years, within the Parish, it had not been known to nest at Goxhill in

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