

Goxhill's Wildlife, continued...

on the mudflats while the blacktails live on both the salt and fresh water marshes). By the first week of August the Dunlin and Ring Plover were here in better numbers than for many years, though maybe only passing through on migration. Many will stay the winter: an odd flock of Grey Plovers are to be seen at times with increasing numbers of Turnstones.

On 13<sup>th</sup> September, a glorious Saturday afternoon, I was having a ride on the Humber flood bank near Goxhill Haven at approximately 4pm and saw a new visitor to the parish, maybe due to Global Warming which had caused it to stray from its native home in South America - a white "Rea." No not a pink panther, a white Rea having an afternoon stroll on the bank top, admiring the view of the river, (I had only been drinking tea and it was also witnessed by three fishermen). It is not every time I go I see such a rarity, a small type of the Ostrich family similar to an Emu. Was it included in the bird count that weekend?

By 17<sup>th</sup> September, the autumn migration is in full flow with all the spring migrants now moving it the opposite direction. Mud flats and fields on the marsh are full of the wading birds, Plovers, four species, Curlew, Black & Bartailed Godwits. There must be a thousand Blacktails with us at this time, with the Dunlin and Ringed Plover joining in. Any day the Pink-Foot geese should arrive from Iceland, at Goxhill Haven there were a 100-plus Goldfinches feeding on a clump of Chicory eating the seeds (when they all got landed on it you could only see a bunch of birds with their Gold wing bars which reflected in the sun, the Chicory had disappeared), a similar number of Linnets were feeding on a nearby wheat stubble, all passing through to their winter quarters; a Merlin looking for a dinner was also around keeping them on the move every few minutes.

24<sup>th</sup> Sept saw a flock of around 400-plus Goldfinches feeding on a newly combined field of spring Rape, again on the move every few minutes. What a sight with all the Gold Wing bars showing when they flew up onto the nearby hedgerow, forever on the outlook for the Sparrow Hawk, Merlin or other winged predators.

October saw the birds of the foreshore and marsh here in ever increasing numbers, which fluctuates daily due to migration (wheatears were passing through to their winter quarters in Africa from August to October as usual). As far as I can recall, there are now more birds than in the days before the Humber became polluted 50 years or so ago with the chemical factories discharging their waste into it which killed almost all the sand worms and other insects/creatures that live in the mud or sand which is food for these bird. Such are their numbers at present, I wonder how the environment can produce enough to fill their tummies - when

these insects/creatures disappeared so did the birds; if it is a case of "No Food No Birds" this proves that the pollution in the Humber has been cleaned out and become habitable again for the insect life. Many of these waders - as the foreshore birds are called - are just passing through to their winter quarters though many of them will stay with us (will they recall their stay as being at Goxhill or have another name for it ?) until the spring when they will return to their breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere. One morning or evening the wise old leaders of the flock decide the weather and time is right, they just take off and go - no bookings, passports, IDs or bankrupt airlines to contend with. The Fieldfares and Redwings (a Scandinavian Thrush) began to arrive for the winter at Hull Fair, the usual date one can expect to see them from then on. Our Song Thrushes at Goxhill have increased in numbers this year...

During the first week of October I saw what I had been looking for in the past three years, the footprints of an Otter. They were in the East Halton beck under a bridge that was always one of their favourite places in the days when they were more common, before the 1960s when the chemicals became overpowering in many uses and were discharged into the streams and poisoned the fish which killed them and in turn the Otters which lived on the fish. The brick pits, becks and drains in North Lincolnshire always had a few with the Otter Hounds having several meets a year, sometimes at the Brocklesby Hunt, Goxhill. Such was the effect on the otters that by the mid 1960s or even sooner the otter was declared extinct in most areas of the British Isles and North Lincolnshire was no exception. An otter sanctuary, the Philip Wayre Otter Trust, near Bungay in Norfolk had a few which survived and continued to breed them to release in the wilds and the first was released in 1983. They have now released 117 and closed down, believing their job is done, leaving the rest to Nature and hopefully numbers will increase in the wilds. Other sanctuaries followed and over the years they too have been successful; for a number of years now reports have been increasing of otters being sighted in Lincolnshire's rivers, including the Ancholme, and creeping ever nearer to Goxhill. Hopefully the sightings will become numerous in the future.

An incident I always remember as a youth regarding otters, in the 1934 era and days of a farming recession the Otter Hounds visited Goxhill Clay pits as usual, (always in summer time due to the water temperature) and killed an otter. While all the hunt followers stood around admiring the days work, the huntsman passed the Cap round (a collection of money to show appreciation) and handed it over the farmer who had the pit. On receiving it he thanked the hunt with a speech and said how he had been preserving the otters for them to hunt for many a year when his 10-year-old son pushed