

**OBSERVATIONS ON THE
FAUNA OF NORFOLK: AND
MORE PARTICULARLY ON
THE DISTRICT OF THE BROADS**

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Observations on the Fauna of Norfolk: And More Particularly on the District of the Broads by
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RICHARD LUBBOCK & THOMAS SOUTHWELL & HENRY STEVENSON

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FAUNA OF NORFOLK,
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THE DISTRICT OF THE BROADS.

BY THE LATE
REV. RICHARD LUBBOCK, M.A.,
Rector of Eccles.

NEW EDITION,
WITH ADDITIONS FROM UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS OF THE AUTHOR, AND NOTES BY
THOMAS SOUTHWELL, F.Z.S.,
Honorary Secretary to the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society;
ALSO A MEMOIR BY
HENRY STEVENSON, F.L.S. ;
AND AN APPENDIX CONTAINING NOTES ON HAWKING IN NORFOLK BY
ALFRED NEWTON, M.A., F.R.S., &c.,
AND ON THE BIRDS, REPTILES, SEA FISH, LEPIDOPTERA, AND BOTANY OF THE
COUNTY.



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1879.

Gough Adds Norfolk
p. 117.

INTRODUCTION.

THIRTY years have passed away since Mr. Lubbock's 'Fauna of Norfolk' appeared, and if at that time it behoved "the guarded ornithologist often rather to speak as *laudator temporis acti* than with reference to the present time when he enumerated the birds of Norfolk," how much more is this the case now! The changes during the past thirty years have indeed been great, perhaps greater than during any like period in the history of our Island. Railways, steam draining mills, and improved cultivation have changed the quaking bogs, where once the Gull placed her procreant cradle, into green pastures where herds feed in safety; the "wavy swell of the soughing reeds" has given place to the bending ears of golden corn; and the boom of the Bittern, the scream of the Godwit, and the graceful flight of the glancing Tern, are sounds and sights altogether of the past.

"Since I first began to sport, about 1816," writes Mr. Lubbock in a note made in 1847, "a marvellous alteration has taken place in Norfolk, particularly in the marshy parts. When first I remember our fens they were full of Terns, Ruffs, and Red-legs, and yet the old fen-men declared there was not a tenth part of what they remembered when boys. Now, these very parts which were the best, have yielded to the steam engine, and are totally drained—the marshes below Buckenham, which being taken care of were a strong-hold for species when other resorts failed, are now as dry as a bowling green, and oats are grown where seven or eight years back *one hundred and twenty-three* Snipes were killed in one day by the same gun. The Claxton marshes, which formerly were almost too wet, are now

as dry as Arabia." Not long since Mr. Rising pointed out to the writer at Horsey a dry pasture which, in his father's time, was a swamp whereon many thousands of Black-headed Gulls nested every summer; the marshes at that time swarming with Bitterns, Grebes, Ruffs, and Avocets; speaking of this same Horsey the late C. S. Girdlestone, of Yarmouth, in a letter to Selby, written in 1824, (*Transactions of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society*, ii., p. 396) says, it "is a most extraordinary place for all sorts of wild birds (though nothing so good as it was ten years ago); . . . it is a most desolate place, and duty at Church is performed only once in a month, and in winter the place is scarcely approachable." Such was the difficulty of getting from place to place in winter, that when a carriage was used, bundles of coarse herbage had to be carried for placing in the wheel ruts, which would otherwise have been impassable. Now all is changed, and a good road leads over the marshes quite up to Mr. Rising's house.

At page 129, Mr. Lubbock gives a graphic picture of the life of a "broad"-man and his round of occupations; there are men who even now continue to lead an almost similar life, and great is their attachment to the freedom and excitement of such an occupation. The family of Hewitt, originally from Barton, is celebrated for its knowledge of "broad"-craft. Robert Hewitt, of Hickling, was the man who captured the Jack Snipe in July, 1825, and his brother William, for many years marsh-man at Hoveton, died on the 11th of September last, in his 78th year. On the 13th May last (1878), I went with him, then a hale old man of 77 years of age, to take the last batch of Gulls' eggs for the season; he was accompanied by his son, a powerful young fellow, who brought forcibly to my mind the dangers of "Camping" (see p. 130) when such men were the "campers." On a recent excursion to another Broad, I was consigned by my friend to the care of his "amphibious man," who as he told me "might almost be said to have been born in a duck boat, cradled there, and to have lived there ever since, the boat having originally been stationed on one Broad, and now floating on the next." These men are intelligent and observant, full of information about birds and fishes, and many a pleasant

hour may be spent chatting with them about the past and present inhabitants of their marshes and broads.

But there is another cause which, in addition to agricultural improvements, has contributed, and that in a large degree, to the extinction or banishment of many birds formerly so common. I allude to the great improvements in guns and boats: here is a description of the gun in olden times.

"The fowler's apparatus," says Mr. Lubbock, "was often most singular, the gun was indeed a 'family piece,' having been in his grandfather's possession. And these treasures used, like Tizona and Colada, the trenchant blades of Ruy Diaz, to have a positive *nom de cresse* bestowed upon them. The gun of an ancient fowler, Thomas, upon Breydon water, was known far and near as 'Old Peggy.' A celebrated destroyer of ducks being rebuked for carrying a gun about with no guard to the trigger, and advised for safety sake to repair it, said she had been so for years, and he thought to have her mended would 'change her luck.'"

So much for the gun; let us see what sort of boat carried him to the attack. "Twenty years ago [this was probably written about the year 1843], all the wild-fowl shooters upon Breydon relied upon two inventions in the boat way, one long, flat-bottomed, upright sided and very narrow, in which by care and caution a man might just avoid an upset when the water was perfectly smooth; the other Dutch-fashioned, Broad-made, very much resembling in build and working the *Goede Vrouw*, in which Knickerbocker tells us the first Low Dutch colonists rolled forth to take possession of the shores of America. To be sure the craft was extremely safe, a twelve-stone man might stand upon the gunnel, and wind and tide in his favour a good rower could accomplish three miles per hour, but the rolling in sculling up to fowl was awful—whilst high in the prow, perched on a transverse beam, was the swivel gun, its muzzle elevated in the air like the great telescope at Slough going on a voyage of discovery. The boat creaked and waddled, the sculler sculled, patiently lying at the bottom of his tub, every wave washing into it as though believing it a natural receptacle for water.

Yet such was the abundance of fowl in those days of plenty, that heavier shots were made by the very few who possessed swivel guns, than ever occur to the shooter of the present day, however well equipped with material. An old man named Thomas, who for many years, with a mighty piece which he called 'Old Peggy,' had the run of Breydon, has killed eighty-three fowl at a shot.* No wonder that with such rude engines, and so few even of those, the fowl remained undiminished; but a great fowler arose, one Col. Hawker, to whom Horsey Mere and Hickling Broad were familiar waters, and soon by force of his example this happy state of things was changed.

"Reader!" says Mr. Lubbock, "take your situation with me on the margin of Hickling water, look at that assemblage of dots dancing up and down far in the lake—seest thou something coming from the right, a long line as it were just above the water—watch it well—what is it, think you? If ever in India, you may suppose it an alligator; if never out of Europe, opine that it is a log of wood—See! it is nearing the pochards, the black dots aforesaid, they are heading up together, their wings open—the first fowl is off the water. A flash, and hark, what a roar! The scene is changed, two figures half rise from the supposed log, a water dog runs forward and slips from the deck into the broad, the boat is turned quickly—bang—bang goes a double barrel at two of the cripples!

"Some years ago an ingenious essay endeavoured to prove murder to be one of the fine arts; the world is probably not half convinced, and still very sceptical on that subject, but I defy any one to read the 'Instructions to young Sportsmen' and not to place wild-fowl shooting amongst the *beaux arts*."

I have elsewhere shown† that with the exception of the

* The Messrs. Paget, speaking of the same man, say, that "one morning on awaking in his boat on the flats, he saw not far from him a number of wild-fowl sitting in a crowd close together on the ice. From the boat being nearly covered with snow, he had escaped their observation, while they were collecting in the night. He immediately fired and secured thirty couples of wild-fowl, consisting principally of Wigeon and Teal."

† 'Ornithological Archeology of Norfolk,' *Transactions of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society*, I, 1870-71, p. 22.