

## CHAPTER 2. Flora & Fauna.

With few exceptions, there is probably very little variation of the Flora and Fauna of Winkleigh, compared with neighbouring parishes. What is important to the devotee of botanical study is that some of the Winkleigh parish plants have been identified definitely by experts, and the Fauna, if not recognised by qualified naturalists in the same way, have been named by keen sportsmen and nature lovers<sup>1</sup>.

The whole of the parish is situated in the carboniferous Culm measures, with cold and heavy soil. The land rises above 600' and drops below 300' in some parts



but most of the parish lies on the 500' areas. The distance from the tidal part of the River Taw (18 miles) absence of chalk and limestone, red, light or sandy soils, are factors precluding most of the plants associated with these varieties of soil.

There are about 22 species of the different orders mentioned in the standard work on this subject (*Flora of Devon* by Martin and Fraser) to be found at Winkleigh. The chief specimens are to be found in the Herbarium of W.P. Hieron at the Royal Albert Museum, Exeter. The remainder were observed by the Rev<sup>d</sup> W. Keble Martin MA. F.L.S.

Winkleigh shares with other districts the changes in size and quantity and



possible extinction of certain plants, due to the hedging and ditching and "paring" of our delightful hedges. Noticable is the unusual size of the foxglove (Cowslip), the beauty of the wood anemone in spring, and the fine colouring of the musk mallow in late autumn. Hollacombe Moor yielded a greater variety of plant life, including some of exquisite beauty, than any other part of our very large parish. The central portion of the 151 acres moor has two bogs running from N and NE. respectively to the South and it was here, in the boglands and adjacent parts that we found plants of interest. Unfortunately, the past tense must be used, for much of what follows no longer applies. The whole of Hollacombe Moor has been ploughed up by the D.W.A.E.C. to the maximum depth, in order to provide more food for the country. Inevitably, much of the interesting material has been destroyed. The plants in the centre of the bog have escaped so far, but their continued existence is threatened by future extensive draining.

However, W.K. Martin records Pale Violet, Allseed, Meadows Thistle (Native) Chaff Weed (Native) and Toad Rush (Native plentiful). At the first bog, from the S.E. side, it will be noticed that the narrow leaved Cotton Grass has overted the heather allowing the Marsh St Johns wort

to mingle with the Bog Asphodel. The Western fuzze has been driven further eastward to settle with the dwarfed specimen of Birds foot Trefoil and the "Red" Blackberry (*Rubus fraxus* Lindl.)<sup>2</sup> On the extreme fringe of the bog, if we look carefully we shall see what one might consider a "fairy" flower - the wry leaved bellflower, blending naturally with another almost as dainty, the bog pimpernel. In the centre grows the sturdy yet graceful Bog bean and mingling with the multifarious common bog plants there was found a garden escape, *Strachys lanata*.

On the whole, the plants of the northern side of the parish are found in greater variety than those of the South, despite the fact that the South has received more detailed and systematic study than the North (Hollacombe Moor excepted). The Head Combe area has unusual characteristics. Here we find Butchers Broom, Columbines, and the Yellow pimpernel in a fairly small space. Water Ragwort covers whole fields of Winkleigh, states the *Flora of Devon*. Other plants mentioned include *Ranunculus heterophyllus* Weber, *Ranunculus penicillatus* Bab. Button (?Bullow) Brook, Corncockle, Fragrant agrimony of Rosaceae, var *Dumalis* (Bechst.) Dum. and *Forma glandulosa* W. Dod. ("probably this Var") E.B.B. respectively Cat's valerian ("plentiful"). *Centaurea nemoralis* Jord *Forma radiata* C.E. Britton; water forgetmenot; Cowwheat (*verhians* Druce) lesser Butterfly orchis; Common



Solonius Seal, Bur-reed  
 (*Sparganium neglectum* Beeby) (rather uncommon)  
*Carex laevigata* Sm. and  
 the hairy sedge. The orders  
 Cruciferae, Caryophyllaceae,  
 Leguminosae, Rosaceae,  
 Umbelliferae, and Scrophularin-  
 -eae are naturally most  
 frequently met with, and Compositae  
 much more than any of the  
 above; whilst many orders  
 are unrepresented.

The parish has been abundantly  
 supplied with trees and  
 there is probably half as much  
 woodland today as when the  
 Domesday survey was made.

The heavy soil, discussed in  
 Chapter One, is most congenial  
 for their growth. Wood Roberts  
 is undoubtedly the richest  
 area for various oaks; and  
 the ash, elm and larch have



contributed to the wants of the  
 builder, wheelwright, cooper  
 and Carpenter, until steam  
 saw-milling on a large scale  
 greatly depleted the harder trees.  
 Beeches flourish and provide  
 fair avenues leading into the  
 village. The french hale, or wild  
 service tree, is numerous. The  
 silvery leaves betray their  
 presence to small children,  
 who mark them for the early  
 frosty mornings, when the dry,  
 rich coloured fruit is ripe.  
 The spindle tree is known as  
 "skipper wood" and their tough  
 boughs provided the lads of old  
 with their strong bows.  
 Christings (*Prunus domestica* L.)  
 is another favourite for  
 children. Chestnut, bullace  
 and aspen are getting scarce  
 Walnut, poplar, yew, lime  
 and plane are rare. Wild



Cherry, Birch, alder Mountain ash, Elder, Great Sallow (Withy), Holly, Scotch Fir, Horsethrust, Sycamore, Hawthorn, Blackthorn and guelder rose are fairly well distributed or cultivated.

Ferns are fairly well represented, but the Royal Fern, found in gardens, is not a native.

The numerous moors, extensive moorland, small plantations, unpretentious streams and freshets, bogs and ponds, together with the nearly 3,000 fields which make up the parish, should provide a reasonably rich variety of mammals, birds and insects. The Devon Naturalists have confined their labours chiefly to within 15 miles of the coast-land (Dartmoor providing a great exception). Hinkleyth therefore is not represented



in any work upon this subject. When this deficiency might have been remedied after the 1914-18 war, the Rev. John Metcalfe MA. a noted entomologist, was forced to reject the dilapidated vicarage and hence the living and a fine field of pioneer study.

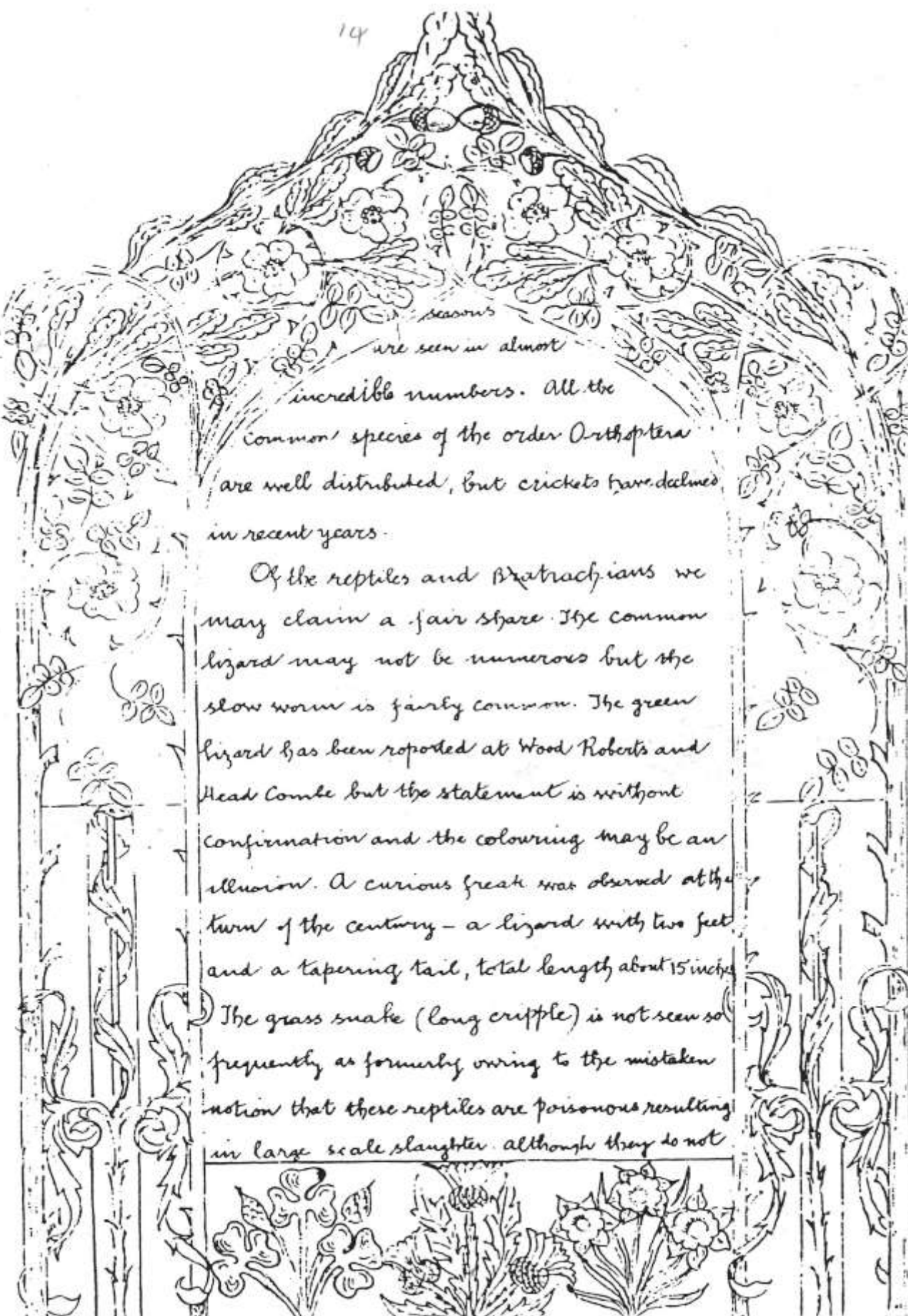
In view of the lack of expert field work, we must be content with amateur observations. The number of foxes, and to a lesser extent badgers, stoats and weasels, has increased greatly. In spite of the number of mole trapped for the sake of their skins (as well as to be rid of a pest) they do not appear to decrease. A slight increase in hedgehogs may account for the diminishing number of reptiles. The pipistrelle or common bat, is abundant.



everywhere. The farms with their sheds and corn ricks shelter the common rat, house and wood mice. The common shrew (Shirley), field vole and water vole are fairly common. Squirrels are seen occasionally and the otter sometimes makes an excursion from the Taw. The common hare is very scarce, having been hunted far too often in recent years. Apart from trapping and shooting, the number of rabbits vary, usually very scarce after a very wet season, and numerous after a mild winter.

When we consider insects, a gradual change and loss of some species have been noticed. Most of the species Coleoptera, Lepidoptera, Diptera and Arachnida are found. Of the latter, two unusual kinds, mottled with black and grey hues, have been noted; one probably *Philotromus marginatus*, was seen in the district as late as 1914 although none has been observed since this date.

Neuroptera is well represented. The dragon fly (flying snake) is fairly numerous. It is seen on the Hollacombe Water, at favorable



are seen in almost  
 seasons  
 (X)  
 incredible numbers. All the  
 common species of the order Orthoptera  
 are well distributed, but crickets have declined  
 in recent years.

Of the reptiles and Batrachians we  
 may claim a fair share. The common  
 lizard may not be numerous but the  
 slow worm is fairly common. The green  
 lizard has been reported at Wood Roberts and  
 Head Combe but the statement is without  
 confirmation and the colouring may be an  
 illusion. A curious freak was observed at the  
 turn of the century - a lizard with two feet  
 and a tapering tail, total length about 15 inches.

The grass snake (long cripple) is not seen so  
 frequently as formerly owing to the mistaken  
 notion that these reptiles are poisonous resulting  
 in large scale slaughter although they do not

attack men, the larger kinds have been known to rise in a threatening attitude when cornered. The neckbands are fairly pronounced. Large specimens (length 3' 8½") are sometimes found and at Head Combe some of their markings are so deep as to appear almost black. Vipers are plentiful, especially in Winkleigh Wood, Wood Roberts, Hollacombe Wood and Head Combe. At the latter place they vary in colour from putty to light brown; in Timbridge Wood some with reddish tints have been seen, at Tarobridge a very dark brick red specimen was noted in 1937. The legend of the viper swallowing her young when in danger is sincerely believed here and many state that they have witnessed the act. Only one man

is known in the parish who would not kill any reptile on sight, and he is not a native but has lived for a considerable time in South Africa.

Common frogs and toads are well distributed. The smoothest is found in most ponds shallow wells and boggy areas.

Salmon come up the small streams from the Taw to spawn. Dace and bream are found in the Taw, but very little of this water passes through the parish. In the smaller streams trout, eels, minnows, loach and stickleback (tom-thumb) abound. Lampreys, at one time plentiful, are now rarely seen. Small dace were noticed in Hollacombe Water in about 1885.

With the exception of the coastal birds, most of the Devon variants are to be





found in the parish. There has been a steady increase of both buzzards and ravens in recent years. The comerate or sandrail is now very scarce and the reason is not at all easy to determine, for they were well distributed over the district about 1900. There has been an increase in the number of woodpeckers, especially of the great spotted kind. It is unlikely that anyone has seen a blackcock in Westlight for some years but there were a few, particularly on the Dolton side of the parish. About 1930 a hen harrier was noticed on Hollacombe Moor. The little owl came into the district some time ago and is now plentiful. The kingfisher has always made its home on the banks of the Hollacombe Water. The kestrel hawk, peregrine falcon and common heron (local name Crane) are occasionally seen at Headcombe. The Black-headed gull is seen

following the farmer working the soil in February, and has been named the barley bird on account of their appearance at the sowing of barley. Occasionally they are seen when it is very stormy on the coast. After some bad seasons partridges are recovering. It is among the resident birds that we shall find most variety, but the migrants have their own interest. In the summer we have the chiffchaff, willow warbler (ox-eye) swallow, martin, swift, nightjar, hoopoe, cuckoo, hobby(?) and quail. In the winter the visitors include the red wing, golden plover, woodcock and grey plover. Of the passing or transient visitors during the double migration of Spring and Autumn only the whimbrel has been noticed. Of the casual visitors only two have been seen and these have included wild geese of unknown species. The only accidental visitor noticed is the little owl, while the pheasant is the only introduced/naturalised species.

