

There's wildlife galore along the River Wharfe

I have often wondered how many folk playing Ilkley Golf Course are able to detach themselves from the game sufficiently to notice the everyday activity around them.

The River Wharfe meanders its way down the full length of the course, this is itself a big attraction to wild life. Nobody could help noticing the abundance of moorhens, feeding happily on its banks, oblivious to events around them.

Only if a human comes too close do they go scurrying along the water.

Dippers are common and can be seen walking about in the shadows and then bobbing under the water in search of food. They are easily recognised by their large white chests.

Mallards are to be found all year round. In spring the ducks can often be seen swimming accompanied by as many as a dozen young, and often pure white drake among them.

The common sandpipers have been there all summer nesting on the river bank, some within yards of where the golfers pass. Herons, too, are there all year. I have spotted as many as three together.

They are shy, easily frightened, and stand motionless in the water on the lookout for food . . . crayfish, or bullheads perhaps. They may even catch the odd trout.

Regular winter visitors are the little grebes, or dab chicks. They are hard to discern, staying on the surface, then diving and re-surfacing 20 yards away.

Oystercatchers, reed bunting, coal tits and many others are seen near the river, but the gem of all must be the kingfisher.

Usually one only glimpses a brilliant flash of turquoise flying low, but one may be lucky and see one perched in a willow waiting to dive after some small fish.



DAVID SPURDEN, an assistant green-keeper at Ilkley Golf Club, has herons, kingfishers, mallards and oystercatchers as his daily companions and has absorbed the mysteries of their lives almost unconsciously. Here he asks us to look anew at the wild life about us.

Regretfully, they are not as prevalent as in previous years.

Away from the river the course is slowly being transformed. It is four years since the club began a tree-planting scheme. Since then some 5,000 trees—mainly pine, larch and birch—have been planted.

For the birds, if not for the golfers, these are a welcome addition.

They have provided homes for at least a dozen pairs of redpoll, their nests previously being unheard of here.

Gold crests, long-tailed tits and many different types of finches can be found searching the plantations for food and who can say what birds the trees may attract in future?

Now that winter is coming, a covey of partridges has re-appeared and pheasant venture out seemingly aware they will not be shot at. Now is the time for waxwings and the nuthatches seen here in the last two years.

Fieldfares are already here, feeding on the hawberries and the kestrel is an everyday sight, as are the feathers which denote their kills.

We must hope that winter will not be too severe on them and that next year we may see the kingfishers increase. This season is surely a cruel, testing time for all these varieties of wild life.