



The Remembering²

"To forget - to fail to remember."³

Memory, it seems, is a strange phenomenon. It slips away silently - subtly changing how we remember the world and thus how we perceive it. The world I see is transformed from the landscape my grandfather would have experienced.

"We are blind to the fact that in our grandparent's day...there would have been species rich wild flower meadows...and coppice woods teeming with butterflies. And their summer nights were peppered with...moths and glow-worms."⁴



Long gone are the tree lined lanes alive with the constant motion and sound of insects. My grandfather is dead - his memories lost. I can no longer measure my reality against his. I can no longer recall the great losses that have occurred since his day - I have forgotten.

"The ancient character of the land, the forests that covered it, and the animals that lived in them...have been forgotten."⁵

In the 1970's traditional mixed farms started to disappear and industrialised agri-business began to dominate the landscape. Hedgerows were ripped up⁵ and wildflower meadows ploughed.⁴ This process all but wiped out Britain's natural habitat and much of its richness and complexity was lost.⁵

"Our memories have been wiped as clean as the land."⁵

New giant fields were sprayed with copious amounts of herbicides and pesticides⁵ - resulting in the almost total disappearance of native flowers and insects from farmland.⁴ Intensive farming and changes in land use due to urbanisation have altered the national landscape beyond anything our grandparents would recognise.

"We live in a shadowland, a dim flattened relic of what there once was."⁵

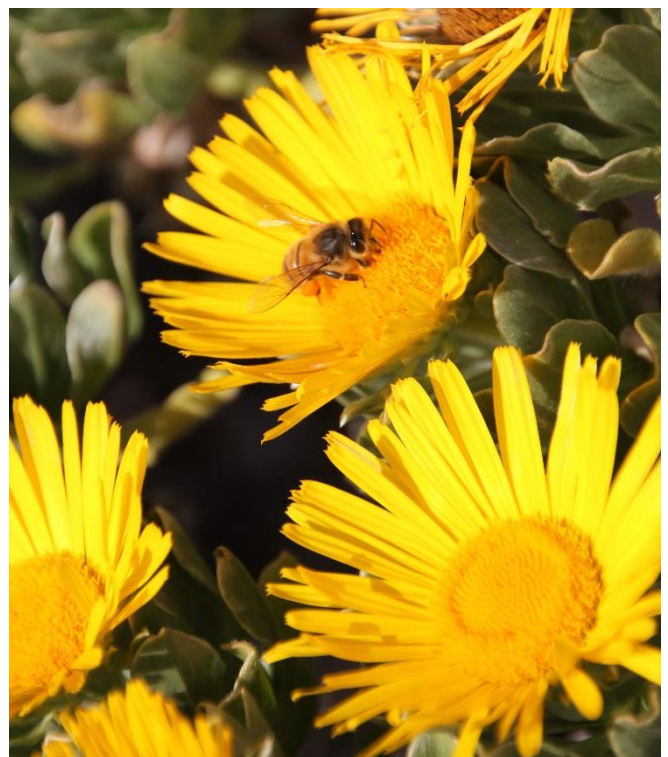
"Memory...the ability of the mind to remember."¹

*"Memory is the process of encoding, storing and retrieving information. If the material is rehearsed long enough it...causes structural changes in the brain. These...are more or less permanent and are responsible for long-term memory."*⁶

Even if we do recognise such changes and ecological loss we usually only as go back as far back as our recollections of childhood. We are unaware that what we considered normal when we were children was in fact already a state of depletion.⁵ Thus with each generation the baseline drops and is considered to be the new normal. The result is a continuous lowering of standards and a generational acceptance of degraded ecosystems. This is called *"Shifting Baseline Syndrome."*⁴ Thus slowly - generation by generation - the natural world slips away.

"Remember - to bring something from the past to mind."³

*"Remembering...the retrieval of implicit memories is automatic: when the appropriate stimulus occurs it ...evokes the appropriate response. Recollection may be aided by contextual variables, including physical objects or...verbal stimuli."*⁶



But memory is elusive and slips away - even in our own lifetimes. My wife and I recently visited Malta. Touring in our small hire-car we became lost and found ourselves alone on a narrow country lane. I got out to try and assess where we were on the map and was suddenly overwhelmed by the sight and sounds of the landscape. Fields full of flowers, the air full of insects, and a constant deep buzzing of activity that assaulted the ears. I was shocked into a quiet contemplation of the abundance of life. I was shocked to realise that I had forgotten that it had once been like this in Britain.

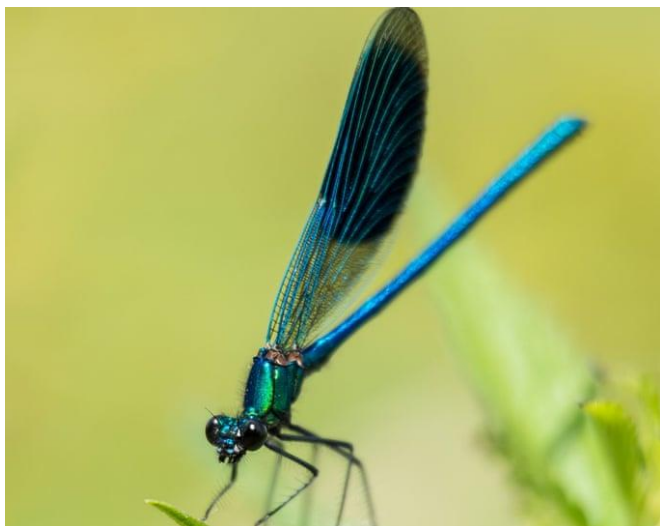
"We forget that there was once more - much, much more."⁴

Suddenly my memory was stimulated and I recalled a garden of my childhood humming with activity. Thousands of bees and other small insects buzzing around scented flowers and butterflies fluttering across the lawn.

"Remembrance - the act of remembering"³

We have forgotten that diversity is the foundation of the complex web of species interrelationships we call nature. The more species living in an ecosystem the higher its productivity and resilience and the greater the mass of living things it can sustain. But the inverse is also true - reduce biodiversity and biomass can decline exponentially.⁴

"Population crashes and extinctions are the signs of an ecosystem unravelling."⁴



Today the United Kingdom is among the most nature-depleted countries in the world. Populations of many species have fallen dramatically. Insects have been particularly badly hit losing more than half of their populations since 1970.⁴ And we barely notice - we have forgotten.

"We are living in a desert compared to our glorious wild past."⁴

It's time to wake up and remember!

DSM

1 Monbiot.G (2017)

Insectageddon: farming is more catastrophic than climate breakdown

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3 Chambers (2004)

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4 Tree. I (2018)

Wilding: The return of nature to a British farm.

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5 Monbiot.G (2013)

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6 Carlson.N, Martin.G and Buskist.W (2000)

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