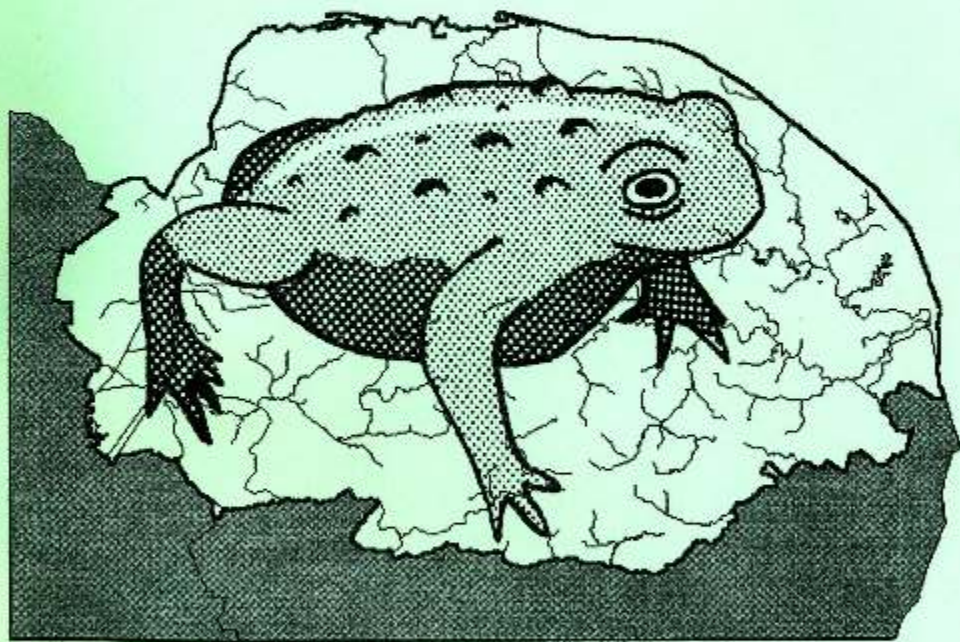


The Norfolk



Natterjack

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society



Number 93

May 2006

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Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

Founded 1869

Reg. Charity No. 291604

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Articles with the camera symbol have associated photographs in the Nats' Gallery (centre pages)

Toad-in-the-hole....

My thanks to all those members who have sent contributions to 'Natterjack'. This edition contains some similar observations on snails from different parts of the county, an unusual form of a common liverwort, badger and bittern behaviour plus a selection of articles requiring member's help in recording. The second Nats' Gallery has been put together by Simon and the colour pages show a range of natural history subjects. Please keep both articles and photos coming. **FF**

A Day by the Wensum

by Tony Howes

An overcast but mild day in early spring makes me keen to get the fishing tackle out and have a few hours by the river. Conditions were perfect this early March morning so with cheese paste as bait I headed for the upper Wensum at Ringland, hoping to catch a few chub.

As I looked down from the road bridge the river appeared to be in ideal condition, normal height and a nice dark tinge of colour. I parked the car and walked down the track and across the meadow, the sheep as usual just gazed at me as I passed, I always feel I am disturbing their privacy. I crossed the small stream by the humpback bridge, another hundred yards and there was the river. It's always a great pleasure to come to this valley, it's quiet and peaceful, has plenty of wild life and the fishing is excellent. During the course of the day I saw kingfisher, water rail, sparrow hawk, kestrel, moorhen and green woodpecker but probably the biggest thrill of all was the otter that swam past. It was just a mere ten feet from me as I sat fishing, I could see the dark eye clearly as it passed, the ripples slowly fading away as it went out of sight round a bend of the river.

To observe and be part of this beautiful landscape for a few hours is a great privilege, as dusk came I packed away the gear and walked back over the meadow, a faint mist was forming covering the valley with a grey/blue veil. The sheep moved grudgingly to let me pass and then I was at the gate when another magical moment came. A barn owl came out of the mist flying along the hedge line - brakes on as it saw me, over the hedge and it was gone, a white ghost of the marshes. There was a definite spring in my step as I walked down the track to the car - oh, and by the way I did catch a few good chub, they were the icing on the cake.



A herald of spring

by Francis Farrow



On 9th April I was doing my usual beat around Beeston and Sheringham Commons when I noticed that I had picked up a passenger. On my shoulder sat a small “furry” insect with a very long thin proboscis. I recognised it as that herald of spring – a primrose sprite or otherwise known as a Dark-edged Bee-fly (*Bombylius major*). As I was in the shade of some willows I continued walking to a clearing. On reaching a sunny spot I gently manoeuvred the insect onto my finger and then on to a tree trunk so it could warm up. Generally these insects are very agile darting around primroses or hovering in clearings and are never still long enough for a photograph. The bee-fly is generally on the wing from early March, however, the coolness of the morning at around 9am must have caught it out or maybe I brushed against some foliage and dislodged it from its slumber.

Small Copper in the Record Books.

by Colin A Jacobs.

During the afternoon of the 27th March 2006 my friend Colin Ayers and I were exploring a newly cleared area of birch scrub at Waveney Forest, Fritton (TG4601), which is in the recording boundaries of both Suffolk and Norfolk.

A small butterfly passed between us and I immediately said to Colin, “that was no Orange Underwing.” As the weather was getting more overcast it settled onto some bracken and we were elated to find a Small Copper butterfly. Neither of us had ever seen this species so early and were sure we had found both Norfolk and Suffolk’s earliest record. On contacting both counties butterfly recorders it was agreed that we had made the history books. The Norfolk Recorder Pat Bonham can find no reference to this species in March at all and Rob Parker of Suffolk says he has one later March record but ours eclipse that some way.



A MASS SNAIL ROOSTING

by Robin Stevenson



Most of us are familiar with small collections of snails hibernating under stones or amongst old flowerpots. However, to find collections of thousands of snails is distinctly less usual.

Such a major mass snail roost was present in the wooded fringe to Barrow Common, just above Brancaster (between TF789434 and TF787433) in early April. A substantial number of trees, including sycamore, ash, hawthorn, elm, beech and Scot's pine, hosted very large numbers of individuals of the common Garden Snail (*Helix aspersa* Müller). Sycamore, being the commonest tree species present, harboured most snails. They were variable in size, although very small (juvenile) individuals were conspicuously absent.

The largest numbers were located fairly low on the trees, often where niches or crevices were present; however, clusters could be seen at heights of 5m or more up the trunks, often in very conspicuous positions. In many instances snails were resting on top of others, several deep. Smooth branches, often of quite small diameter, seemed as likely to be roosting sites as more mature, fissured, bark.

No systematic attempt was made to count the snails present, but the numbers certainly ran into several thousands.

These mass congregations would seem like an obvious target for predators, however, although there were a few broken and empty shells in the vicinity, they were not more abundant than one might normally expect. Presumably, as with flocking birds and schooling fish, there is some sort of safety in numbers.

Are such mass roostings common? How far do individual snails travel to reach a roosting site? And how do they 'know' where to go? A block of more solid conventional woodland lies somewhat to the west, again dominated by sycamore; no mass roosts could be seen there at all. Perhaps, in large blocks of woodland the snails disperse in small numbers, and are much less conspicuous, whereas in a narrow fringe of woodland, such as that along the edge of the Common, they become much more conspicuous, because concentrated? Do such concentrations occur every year, or has the more prolonged cold spell this spring been – in some way – responsible?



Garden Snails in Ash Tree.

by Colin A Jacobs



Whilst visiting Wheatfen on the 7th March with Kevin, a beginner friend, I introduced him to David Nobbs, the warden, and soon we got onto a conversation on natural history photography, a common interest of ours. Amongst his new prints he proffered one he had taken at Surlingham of Garden Snails attached to an Ash tree. There were several of these snails, approximately 80, all in a line along a lightning strike scar.

After our walk around Wheatfen my friend and I went to have a look for ourselves. I took a photograph, although it looked as if birds had eaten some snails and that most had expired.

Still it was a sight, which neither of us had ever seen before.

SPLIT GILLS NOW IN NORFOLK

by Tony Leech



The Split Gill fungus (*Schizophyllum commune*) is distinctive. It is a creamy-white to brownish gill fungus, hairy when young and wrinkled when older, which grows sideways in masses of overlapping caps. And to clinch the identification just take a close look at its gills – each bears a deep groove in its edge, giving the appearance of a ‘split gill’. This fungus is one of the most widespread, having been recorded from all continents except Antarctica. Its ‘natural’ substrate is rotten wood – of almost any species – but in 1990 it was found, both in Co Leitrim, Northern Ireland and in Devon, emerging from polythene-wrapped silage bales. Since then it has become widespread in Northern Ireland, with over a quarter of all farms canvassed reporting its occurrence on bales. It is becoming more widespread in southern England but has not been recorded in Scotland, nor in Norfolk until Pat Williamson asked me to identify the fungus growing from a silage bale in a photograph she had taken last November at Briston and reproduced in Nats’ Gallery.

Interest in this fungus has been increased by the discovery that it occasionally causes serious human disease – not by poisoning but from the fungus developing in human tissues. Almost all cases, which include sinusitis, brain tumours, ulcers and lung infections, have occurred in patients with depressed immune systems, but a few cases of infections in otherwise healthy children have been reported in America. If you do find the fungus it is probably best not to sniff it too vigorously but do please let me know.



Common liverwort in a rare state.

by Robert Maidstone

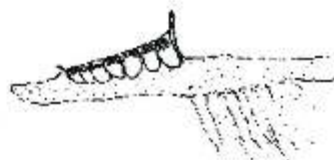
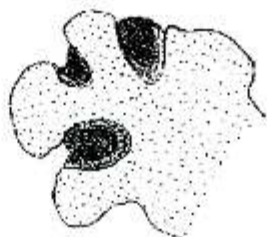
I've been awkward again. I went to the excursion to Alderford Common where they were looking for mosses and arrived late (again).

I joined the late starters group and we made our way slowly down one of the tracks into the Common. At first there was not much to see - most of the mosses under the scrub were all the same species so I wandered ahead. Half way down the track and on the bank at the side was a small patch of that common liverwort, *Lunularia cruciata*, that coats the damp soil of our outside flowerpots, hardly worth pointing out to the august experts of the Moss Group.

However on the edge of some of fronds I spotted some dark patches. They were similar to the normal crescent-shaped gemma cups in shape. But instead of the small green gemmae, the plants usual method of vegetative reproduction, the cup was topped with a dark lumpy skin. At first I hoped they were some weird fungus or damage by a liverwort-eating insect, even the leader of the group had not seen anything like it before.

At lunch the identity of the dark patches was confirmed as male gametes, a structure seldom seen on this liverwort in this country.

Lunularia cruciata is essentially a southern species and here towards the northern edge of its range it seldom takes the effort to produce sexual organs. Whether the general change in climate has promoted the production of these sexual organs is not sure but it would be worthwhile for other Society members to check their pots of this liverwort for these organs and the female gametes. The latter are star-like structures at the top of a tall stalk, similar to those seen on that other common liverwort, *Marchantia polymorpha*, that has round gemma cups.



Badger RTA's

by John Crouch

A study of badger road traffic accidents (RTA's) in Norfolk was undertaken and a brief summary of the information gathered follows:

This research was triggered by investigations into "Day Nests". An active Norfolk sett occurs near the trunk of a very old Beech tree, which last year was blown over during a period of strong winds. The trunk was revealed to be hollow, and over a period of 13 days it was noticed that copious amounts of bedding material was being placed into this hollow. The question was; is this going to become and be used as a badger day nest?

A remote controlled camera system was installed nearby, to monitor the activity around the tree trunk after dark. On checking the system the following morning it was noted that there were 17 exposures, so the film was promptly taken to be developed. Later that day the prints were collected with a certain degree of excitement, however on examination the photographs revealed some interesting information.

The first print was of a boar badger standing beside the trunk, the following 16 were of badger snouts, in one instance there were 3 snouts in the picture! The badgers had been playing with the camera and setting off the flash unit! Did the flash, or the sound of the camera motor winding on the film attract them? Numerous experiments were conducted and the conclusion was that the badgers were indeed attracted by the flash unit firing.

This revelation then begged the question; are badgers attracted to the headlights of oncoming motor vehicles when attempting to cross roads? It is believed that badgers feel the vibrations of oncoming motor vehicles through their feet, then sometimes stop and turn towards the vehicle, with usually tragic results.

A series of experiments were conducted to attempt to answer this question, they were conducted near well-used badger runs in country lanes. The runs were selected carefully, in order to allow approaching badgers to be observed through night-vision equipment.



The first experiment involved the vehicle being parked without the engine running, and as soon as a badger started to cross the road the headlights were turned on full completely illuminating the animal concerned. In 82% of cases the badger stopped and looked towards the lights, in one instance a sow badger which had already crossed the road came back to join the boar standing in the road. As soon the lights were turned off, the badgers continued on their journeys.

The next experiment involved having the engine running of the stationary vehicle when a badger started to cross the road, the results were almost identical, whereby 81% of badgers stopped.

Thirdly, the final stage was to approach the crossing badger by driving towards it with the headlights full on, in this instance the results were that 93% of badgers stopped and faced the vehicle. Was it vibrations or the headlights that caused the badgers to stop, or a combination of both?

These experiments have been conducted from 1st October 2005, until 7th March 2006. More detailed research will commence in the late autumn of this year and involve using more than one vehicle being parked and others coming from opposite directions.

The above results do provide some food for thought. Observations and comments would be welcomed.

Other experiments in the past have used the Red Fox as the target species. This research involved using vehicles and high-powered spotlights. The conclusions were that the foxes attempted to run between the headlights of oncoming vehicles when suddenly caught in the open on a road at night. In the heat of the moment do they feel that the area between the lights is a safe haven?



NB: On 1st June 2006 (7.00pm) John will be giving a talk on the Eurasian Badger, at the Woodland Burial Park at Colney.



KELLING BITTERN PUTS ON A SHOW

by John Wagstaff



Since I came to live in Holt in 1998, Kelling water meadow has become a favourite and regular birdwatching site for me. Arriving there at 2pm last New Years Eve I could see large numbers of fieldfares, redwings and mistle thrushes feeding in the short grass. With a view to counting them I scanned the meadow through binoculars and suddenly found myself looking at a bittern. It was crouched and partly hidden behind a clump of rushes in the middle of the meadow.

A few minutes after I had set up my telescope, the bird stood up and started walking around, totally exposed and apparently unconcerned about the cattle walking within a few yards of it. After watching it for ten minutes I telephoned the pager service to give other birders a chance to see it. No one turned up – but why would they with a Ross's gull at Cley?

Two tractors towing trailers full of shooters then arrived in the field opposite but the noise from these people and their guns had no obvious effect on the bittern. Nor did it move away later when the farmer drove his noisy lorry down the lane and then walked across the meadow within 50 yards of the bird. For a species I have always regarded as wary and secretive this behaviour seemed strange. My first thoughts were that it was an immature bird or, maybe, an injured or exhausted adult. However, when it flew quite normally across the meadow and went to roost in a reed patch at 4.25pm it appeared to be healthy.

I had superb views of the bittern on many subsequent days, as did a good many other birders, and last saw it on 13th Feb. It spent a lot of time crouched very low amongst the taller grasses and rushes and was sometimes not easy to locate. When it did walk, very stealthy, it was seen to catch a good number of frogs.

On one occasion, when a male hen harrier flew across the meadow, the bittern flattened itself as near the ground as possible. It acted in a similar way on another day when a barn owl approached it. However, when a model aircraft flying low across the meadow alarmed the bird, instead of crouching it stood upright with its neck and bill pointing skywards. I have always thought of this as a posture used in reedbeds and other tall vegetation as a means of camouflage. Surely it cannot be very effective in the open. Are there eccentric bitterns – just as there are eccentric birdwatchers?



NATS' GALLERY - May 2006

NOCTURNAL VISITOR

On returning one evening in August to her Edgefield home, Pat Williamson was puzzled by a whirring noise in the garden.

Investigation revealed a *Convolvulus* Hawkmoth, a rare migrant, which she managed to photograph as it fed.

Photo: Pat Williamson.



PRIMROSE SPRITE aka DARK-EDGED BEE-FLY.

Beeston Common, 9 April. Usually hyperactive, the cool of the morning allowed this revealing portrait (see text). Photo: Francis Farrow.



WATER SPIDER *Argyroneta aquatica*

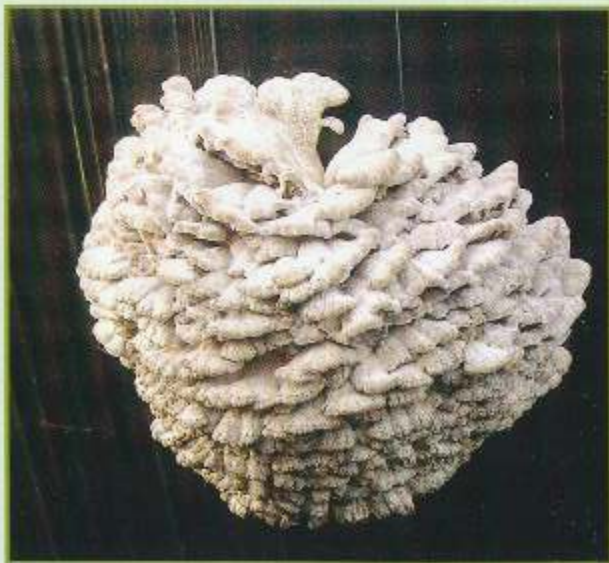
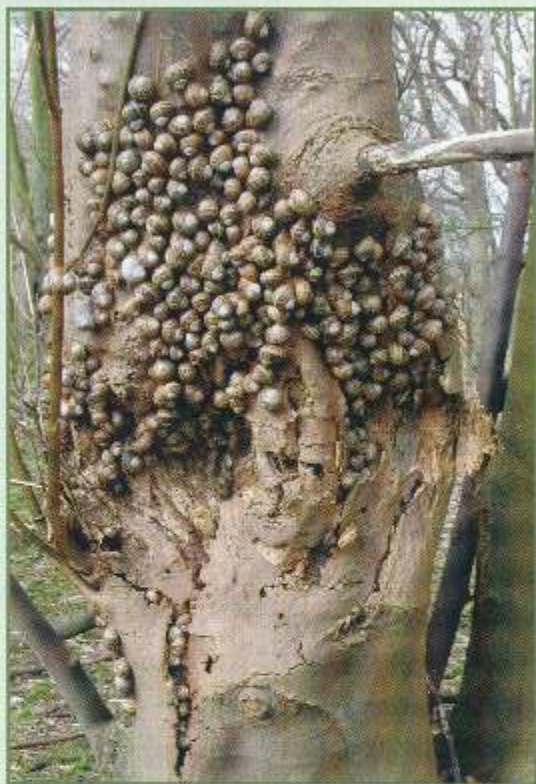
Thompson Water. The Angling syndicate had undertaken a major 'weed' clearance and hundreds of Water Soldiers were dumped behind the bank. An examination at home of two handfuls of weed revealed this water spider. Photo: Bob Blandford.



SNAILS GALORE!

TWO REPORTS OF MASS-ROOSTING BY GARDEN SNAILS

See text for details. Left, in an Ash tree at Surlingham, 7 March, Photo: *Colin A Jacobs*. Right and bottom left, Barrow Common, April. Photos: *Robin Stevenson*.





COMMON BITTERN. Rarely seen well, visitors to Kelling enjoyed unusually good looks this winter (see text). Photo: Brian Macfarlane.



AQUATIC LIVERWORT *Riccia*

fluitans is the commonest of several floating liverworts. This specimen, found by Carl Sayer in a field pond near Briston (and confirmed by John Mott), is the 4th record for East Norfolk. Photo: Tony Leech.

GHOSTLY MOLE This leucistic mole was trapped by Russell Cox in Sheringham Cemetery. Its colouration is similar to animals from Guist reported in the 2002

**SPLIT BALE –
SPLIT GILL**

The distinctive Split Gill fungus (left) has recently colonized a new habitat – polythene-wrapped silage bales. Although becoming widespread, this specimen from Briston is the first reported for Norfolk. Photo: Pat Williamson





EARLY MARSH ORCHID

Tharston, 13 June.
The flowers are typically small and face-on appear narrow (due to the upraised 'arms' and folded lip). On most plants they are a delicate shade of pink (see text). All photos: *Simon Harrap.*



SOUTHERN MARSH ORCHID

Wells, 22 June. The lip is broad, with a pattern of dots and short streaks concentrated in the centre..



EARLY MARSH ORCHID

subspecies *coccinea*, Overstrand, 17 June. This beautiful 'Indian Red' form is found at Holme and Overstrand.



SOUTHERN MARSH ORCHID

Kelling, 13 June. By far the commonest marsh orchid in Norfolk. Usually found in marshy places, it can, as here, grow on dry grassland. The flowers are various shades of purplish-pink but overall there is relatively little variation in flower colour.

75 Years Ago - from the *NNS Transactions*

The following paper was presented in Volume XIII-Part II 1930-31

The 'Norfolk' Room at the Norwich Castle Museum

by Frank Leney, Curator

In the scheme of re-arrangement of the Natural History collections of the Norwich Castle Museum, the most important point is the proposal to utilize one of the large galleries as a Norfolk Room, wherein will be displayed all that is most characteristic of the wild life of the county. The Broads, Brecklands and Coast are features for which the county is famous, and it is intended to show, in cases as realistic and beautiful as the best modern craftsmanship can contrive, the plants, birds and animals, which are to be found in these special surroundings. Such cases will be the main features of the gallery, and no effort will be spared to make exhibits of such beauty and interest as will attract wide attention and stimulate the desire to protect and preserve the wild life which still survives in Norfolk. There are, of course, many other exhibits that will find a place in this gallery, and the guiding principle throughout will be that each shall be as perfect of its kind as skill can make it. The Norfolk Room will give point and purpose to the work of young naturalists and will encourage them to make the Norfolk collections as complete as possible, following the work of the members who founded the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society and compiled the Norfolk Lists of Fauna and Flora in the earlier volumes of the *Transactions*.

The Corporation of the City of Norwich has approved and supported the scheme of re-arrangement of the natural history collections, and the cost will be spread over a period of years. It is hoped that the county of Norfolk will show its appreciation of the generosity of the City, which maintains the Museum for the benefit of all, by contributing its share of the cost. At the Annual Meeting of the N. and N. Naturalists' Society, April, 1931, the sum of one hundred guineas was voted to the scheme. As the Sub-Committee entrusted by the Castle Museum Committee to carry out the work includes Mr. Robert Gurney, D.Sc., F.L.S., Mr. B. B. Riviere, F.R.C.S., F.Z.S., M.B.O.U., Mr. H. H. Halls, Mr. H. J. Thouless, Mr. H. J. Howard, F.L.S., and Mr. Gerard Gurney, F.Z.S., F.E.S., M.B.O.U., all naturalists in the city and county may feel assured that the scheme will be carried out on scientific lines.



Photographic Group

We had a very successful evening on the evening of 23rd January, when we had an additional meeting to invite people to learn more about Digital imaging. The attendance was higher than usual indicating a desire to find out more about the new technology.

The forthcoming season has been arranged so that the slant is towards digital, but film buffs will still find plenty to interest them.

The first meeting will be in October where there will be the usual mix of members showing their own work, both film and digital. It will give the new digital enthusiasts a chance to share their work.

It's now up to all camera-owning members to spend the summer months capturing those images of nature to share in our winter programme.

Brian Macfarlane

A change of scene

Colin Penny, Society member and former Voluntary warden of Buxton heath has swapped the relative flat lands of Norfolk for the mainly volcanic mountain region of Hungary known as the Mátra. Here the wildlife couldn't be more different and impressive. Imperial Eagle, Black Woodpecker, Collared Flycatcher, Wild Boar, Mouflon, Beaver, Fire Salamander, Green Tree Frog, Wall Lizard, Large Copper, Hungarian Glider, Map Butterfly, Preying Mantis, Wart-biter, Yellow Scabious, Blue Pimpernel and Cross Gentian to name but a few of the specialities of the immediate area. Other nearby locations include habitats for the Great Bustard, Glossy Ibis and Saker Falcon.

As part of the Mátrafüred Wildlife Group Colin can arrange tours. These can be very flexible and tailored to individual interests. Anyone interested in joining Colin can find further details on the following website: www.matrawildlife.com



Faden's 1797 Map of Norfolk

Norfolk's naturalists have used Faden's map, the first large-scale map (at one inch to the mile) of the whole county, for many years. It shows the woodland, wetland, heaths and commons we had over two hundred years ago, which is of historic interest but also of relevance to the present day distribution of certain fauna and flora within the county. Surveyed in the early 1790's by two of the most experienced surveyors in the country (Thomas Donald and Thomas Milne) was published in London by William Faden. It is uncertain exactly how many maps were originally printed but from surviving correspondence it seems likely that about 2500 were produced. Many are now in libraries and private hands in United States as William Faden was well regarded there through his map publishing during the American War of Independence.

The map is not without its faults. It is, as a generalisation, not good on woodland; some have been omitted and others are incompletely drawn. Perhaps because parliamentary enclosure was imminent, the heaths, commons and greens that were then such a feature of the Norfolk landscape, are accurately portrayed. Within thirty years of Faden's publication the commons and heaths had virtually all disappeared, leaving their footprint in the distribution of certain flora. Faden entered his Norfolk map for a prize offered by the Royal Society of Arts and this is why his drawing of the rivers and wetland within the county is so detailed.

Not only are naturalists fascinated by the map; students of Norfolk's agricultural, social and landscape history still repeatedly refer to the map. Until recently the most readily available version of the map was that published by the Larks Press with its detailed introduction by Christopher Barringer. It has now been digitally redrawn and is available as a single sheet covering the whole county or as six individual sheets (as in the original publication). Details of this new version of the map can be found at:-

<http://www.fadensmapofnorfolk.co.uk>

and a sample, as a small flyer, is enclosed in this issue of 'Natterjack'.

Dr. Andrew Macnair Tel 01362 683372

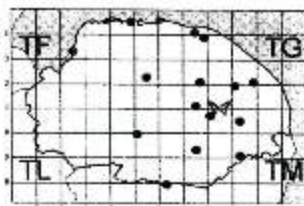
PS. The spelling of the website is critical. Note there is an 's' in the middle.



Excursion

Reports

● 2006-07 Field
Meeting location
John Innes Centre
Indoor meetings



No Excursion Reports in this issue, however, the following events will take place between May and August:

Sunday
May 7th
1000 hrs

Joint full-day meeting with Great Yarmouth Naturalists' Society at Bath Hills, Ditchingham, mainly for uncommon spring plants. With Colin Jacobs. Meet Bungay Golf Club car park off B1062: TM 331901. Please contact Colin at 01502 569136 or 07798696709 or colin.jacobs@tesco.net
Note the early start time.

Sunday
May 21st
1030 hrs

'Wild flowers revealed'. An introduction to plant identification 14: Horningtoft Wood & nearby pasture. With Gillian Beckett & other NNS botanists. By kind permission of Mr. C. Palmer. Meet at Manor Farm: TF 944238.

Sunday
June 4th
1100 hrs

Tas Valley circular walk.
With Robert Maidstone. Meet at Tas Valley Vineyard, Fornsett: TM 158921.

Saturday
June 17th
1100 hrs

Full-day meeting at Catfield Hall Fen.
With Alec Bull & other Society experts.
Meet initially at the church: TG 382213.

Wed 28th &
Thurs 29th
June

Royal Norfolk Show, with N&NNS stand.
RNAA Showground, Easton: TG 150107.
Normal parking & entrance charges payable.

Sunday
July 9th
1100 hrs

Full-day visit to Snettisham Coastal Park, mainly for the wildlife of the calcareous sand, shingle & wetland. With Liz Hammler. Meet in the car park: TF 647335. Parking charge payable.

Sunday
July 23rd
1030 hrs

'Wild flowers revealed': an introduction to plant identification 15: Felbrigg Park. With Dr. Bob Leaney & other N&NNS botanists. Meet in National Trust car park near the Hall: TG 194394.



RESEARCH

Round-up

In this section you can find projects and requests for information on a range of Norfolk's natural history.

Early Marsh Orchids in Norfolk



Everyone loves orchids, but most naturalists stand well back when they see marsh orchids (members of the genus *Dactylorhiza*) and prefer to leave them well alone; they have a reputation for being very difficult to identify, a difficulty compounded by numerous hybrids and intermediates.

It is true that two of the species found in Norfolk, Southern and Narrow-leaved Marsh Orchids, can be hard to separate (the latter has recently been re-, re-named Pugsley's Marsh Orchid to celebrate the fact that it is endemic to Britain and Ireland). The third species, Early Marsh Orchid (*D. incarnata*) is, however, relatively straightforward to identify. Its flowers are a very distinctive delicate pale rose pink and it has relatively bold dark markings in the centre of the lip, usually enclosed within a more or less solid dark line that forms a 'double loop'. All other marsh orchids have darker, purplish-pink flowers, usually with smaller and more diffuse markings, without a dark double loop. If in doubt, get out a ruler; in Early Marsh Orchid the flowers are rather small and the lip of the flower, when carefully spread with a finger or ruler, is never more than 9mm wide and often rather less. The other marsh orchids usually have broader lips. All in all, Early Marsh Orchid is very distinctive when you see one. I can remember being very confused, but it was because I had never seen the real thing!

Having said that the flowers are pale pink, there is some variation in Early Marsh Orchid, and odd plants can have purple flowers, although this colour form is rare in Norfolk. What we do have is the lovely red-flowered form of Early Marsh Orchid (subspecies *coccinea*), which often looks like a squat little hyacinth and which grows in the dunes at Holme and on the flushed cliffs at Overstrand.



Sadly, Early Marsh Orchid seems to have slipped through the conservation net - the 2005 list produced by the JNCC gives it the status of 'Least Concern' and it has no conservation designation. But, in common with species such as Goldenrod and Petty Whin, it seems to have declined dramatically in recent years. It used to be found, usually in small numbers, in fens, dune slacks and in damp, unimproved meadows, and it is the last habitat that has either disappeared or changed radically due to a lack of grazing. The Flora of Norfolk records it from over 100 tetrads, but even just a few years later, how many sites still survive? To find out, I am particularly keen to hear from anyone who has seen Early Marsh Orchid in Norfolk in the last few years and would be grateful for details of location and habitat. Please let me know (and I will pass on all the details to the relevant county recorder).

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Norfolk Butterflies earliest and latest dates in 2005

by Patrick Bonham

High Beeches, Dixon Road, North Walsham NR28 9EA

The table opposite is updated from Butterfly Conservation's spring newsletter. It is based on all records received up to 14 April 2006. They're of single butterflies unless followed by a number or letter code (B = 2-9, C = 10-29). If you haven't yet sent me your records perhaps this will encourage you to do so - especially if your name should have appeared here! I've tried to include all the records I can trace, but of the many thousands received if I've accidentally overlooked any early or late reports that might have been telephoned or emailed to me, please accept my apologies.

It's still too soon to comment on the season as a whole, other than to say that overall it was no better than the poor summer of 2004, and way down on 2003. The five 'vanessids' - Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Comma - were again scarce, apart from a welcome autumn flush of Red Admirals and Commas. The 'browns' seem to be recovering from 2004, and Holly Blues had another good season.



Species	Earliest	Place	Observer	Latest	Place	Observer
Small Skipper	June 16	Hickling Broad	Derek Longe	Aug 30	Harling Heath	G & P Ninham
Essex Skipper	June 16	Hickling Broad	Mike Harvey	Aug 26	Foxley Wood	Maurice Riches
Large Skipper	June 7	Lolly Moor	David Ruthven	Aug 23	Fulmodeston	Gillian Beckett
Dingy Skipper	May 11	Foulden Common 2	David Ruthven	June 8	Narborough 6, Foulden Common 2	Maurice Riches
Grizzled Skipper	Apr 29	East Harling Heath	Eunice Phipps, Jan Grint, Paul Westley	June 20	Northwold Fen	Liz Goodyear
Swallowtail	May 14	Rockland St Mary	per Tim Studwick	Sept 4	Woodbastwick	Maurice Riches
Crowded Yellow	June 9	Catfield Fen	Janet West	Aug 16	Holme	Birdguides report
Brimstone	Mar 16	Lynford B Thetford Stow Bedon Sporwston Hoveton	Neil Glenn Mike Toms Phil Childs Maurice Riches Stewart Wright	Nov 18	Glandford	Averi Monteath
Large White	Apr 16	Ludham	L.D. Partridge	Oct 17	Happisburgh East Runton	Peter Gluth Alan Humbles
Small White	Mar 23	Holme Happisburgh	Derek Longe Pat & Mary Bonham	Nov 1	Norwich	Margaret How
Green-veined White	Apr 2	Worthing	David Knight	Oct 2	Holkham	Peter Gluth
Orange Tip	Apr 10	Lolly Moor	David Ruthven	June 26	Bedingham 10	Ruth Hadman
Green Hairstreak	Apr 24	North Tuddenham	B & B Pummell	June 23	Grimes Graves	Maurice Riches
Purple Hairstreak	June 28	Hoveton Hall	Stewart Wright	Aug 28	North Tuddenham	B & B Pummell
White- l Hairstreak	June 28	Folkham Pines 50+	Adrian Riley	Aug 3	Horstead	Gordon Boulter
Small Copper	May 5	East Harling Heath 2	Eunice Phipps, Jan Grint, Paul Westley	Nov 4	Harling Heath 3	G & P Ninham
Silver-studded Blue	June 17	Kelling Heath 2	John Wagstaff	Aug 31	East Ruston	Maurice Riches
Brown Argus	May 14	Stoke Ferry 3	B.C. field trip	Oct 9	Swanton Pools	B & B Pummell
Common Blue	May 18	Burnham Thorpe 3	Pat & Ken Limb	Sept 19	Horseay Gap	Peter Taylor
Holly Blue	Mar 21	Norwich	Roland Rogers	Oct 4	Yarmouth Cemetery	John Eaton
White Admiral	June 19	Catfield Fen 2	Phil Childs	Aug 13*	Horning	B & E George
Red Admiral	Mar 16	Lynford Arboretum	Neil Glenn	Dec 24	Repps	Stewart Wright
Painted Lady	May 5	Paston	Bob & Jill Cobbold	Nov 9	Paston	Bob & Jill Cobbold
Small Tortoiseshell	Feb 10	Sheringham	Alec Humphrey	Nov 29	Norwich	Paul Woolnough
Peacock	Jan 30	Denver Sluice	Philip Parker	Nov 8	South Walsham	Clifford Miller
Comma	Mar 16	North Walsham	Mary Bonham	Oct 30	Ditchingham	Dorothy Cheyne
Dark Green Fritillary	June 27	Horseay Gap B Kelling 2	Phil Heath Carl Sayer	Aug 31	Horseay Corner	Chris Tyler-Smith
Speckled Wood	Apr 2	Norwich	Margaret How	Oct 27	Harling Heath	G & P Ninham
Wall Brown	May 2	Bedingham	Ruth Hadman	Sept 9	Upton Fen	G & P Ninham
Crayling	July 10	East Runton	Alan Humbles	Sept 19	Horseay Gap	Peter Taylor
Gatakeeper	June 22	Ringslead B Harling Heath	Gillian Beckett G & P Ninham	Sept 3	Foxley Wood	Derek Longe
Meadow Brown	June 16	Hickling Broad	Mike Harvey, Derek Longe	Sept 13	East Runton	Alan Humbles
Ringlet	June 18	North Tuddenham	B & B Pummell	Sept 2	Ringslead Downs 2	Malcolm Bailey
Small Heath	May 11	Cranwich Heath 21	David Ruthven	Oct 2	Burnham Overy	Wendy Gluth

*Plus a single **second-brood** individual, the only one reported in Britain as far as I know, seen on 23 September at Hoveton Hall by Stewart Wright.

A new website: Those of you who have access to the internet might like to check out a site dedicated to the wildlife of Sheringham and Beeston Regis Commons - <http://www.beestoncommon.org.uk> - the site contains history, recent sightings and data lists plus a photographic gallery of a great many of its varied flora and fauna.



Alexanders (*Smyrniolus satrum*) Survey

This strong growing biennial to monocarp is all too familiar to those who live near the coast or in the parts of the county where it has long been established. It was introduced into this country as a pot herb long before records were made. As it is native to Mediterranean Europe with a distribution, as its name suggests, as far east as Smyrna and as far south as Alexandria, and was almost certainly brought here by the Romans. Over the last 2000 years, however, its distribution does not appear to have moved far from coastal areas. There are no records for Norfolk until the second half of the 19th century, though some of the plant collectors may well have had a bias against plants which were plainly not natives. It was recorded in the 1790s 'from near Makerell's Tower' in Norwich, but John Salmon, who kept records in the Thetford area in the 1830s, does not mention it and the first pressed specimen is the Norfolk herbarium at the Shire Hall in Norwich (Hb NWH). This was collected at Wells-next-the-Sea by Dr Frederick Long (father of Dr Sidney Long, one of the founders of the present NWT) in 1884.

That this plant spread so little in so many centuries is almost certainly the result of climatic factors. In its native region it has developed to make the best of seasons with mild, moist winters but a summer, often characterised by drought which creates a much less favourable growing season. To accommodate this it begins its new growth as the rainy season starts in late summer to early autumn, grows through the winter, flowers and fruits and then dies. Rosettes which suffer damage or do not grow strongly enough can remain largely vegetative through the summer and flower at the end of their second winter. In this country it follows the same pattern, but with the average winter of past seasons, plants will have lost their leaves to deep snow and sharp frosts, this will have considerably weakened them. When such winters were a regular feature, similar conditions for three or more years would have been sufficient to have obliterated it entirely. After the 1963 winter, no flowers could be found outside a coastal strip which could have been measured in hundreds of metres rather than miles. Such winters have not occurred seriously since and *Smyrniolus* has been advancing inland as fast as its ability to spread its seed has allowed.

The seeds themselves are quite large and appear to be spread best by mechanical means. This can include road verge trimming, movement of heavy machinery, both by bumping against the stems when the seed is ripe and moving them along in mud on tyres etc. In the past deliberate sowing for its edible value may have been a factor as today is sowing in a new area 'because it is so lovely' as was reported to one of our recorders!

The map shows its progress in the last seven years. Grey squares represent records made for the Norfolk Flora up to 1999, black dots those made from 2000 onwards. Where black dots overlie grey squares, plainly it has been seen in both surveys



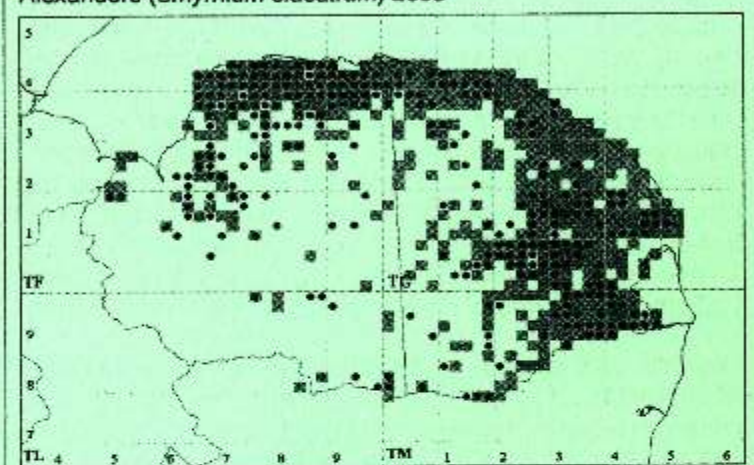
while black dots alone give an indication of its spread. Since 2000 coverage has been patchy in a few parts of the county and most grey-only squares are more likely to be for that reason rather than a sudden disappearance of the plant!

Many thanks to all who have sent in records, and if you can add a missing black dot, please let one of us know.

The harebell survey is also being continued for another year and again there are still large gaps,

especially where it is probably most common, so again let's make our records as accurate as we can. All records welcome.

Alexanders (*Smyrnium olusatrum*) 2005



Records should be sent to Gillian Beckett, Bramley Cottage, Docking Road, Stanhoe, PE31 8QF / Bob Ellis, 11 Havelock Road, Norwich, NR2 3HQ

The next issue of '*The Norfolk Natterjack*'
will be August 2006.

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July 1st 2006
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