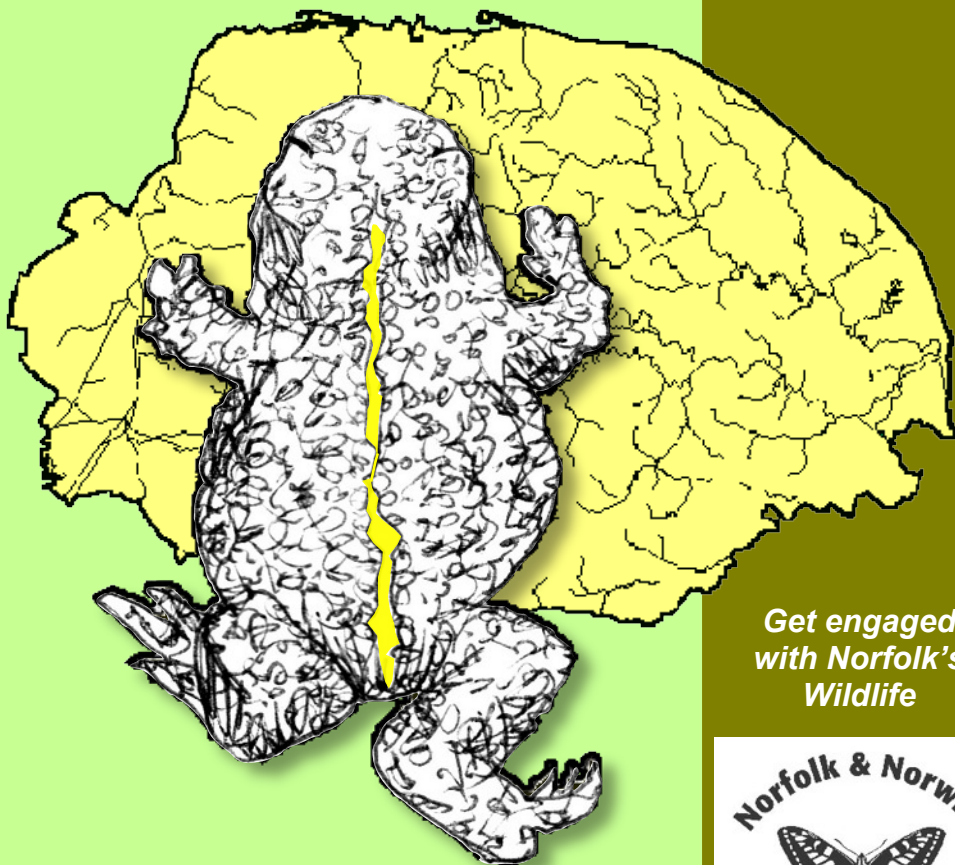


The Norfolk

SPRING 2012
Number 116

Natterjack



*Get engaged
with Norfolk's
Wildlife*



The quarterly bulletin of the
Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

www.nnns.org.uk

Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

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Reg. Charity No. 291604

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

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Toad-in-the-hole....

Whether you feel the temptation of a winter wood, the spiritual setting of Walsingham or just to be out and about Norfolk watching its avian fauna - I hope you will find something of interest in this 'Natterjack'. My thanks to all contributors to this edition and all the best to members for 2012. Hope to hear of your observations and expeditions in the County throughout this coming year. **FF**

The Temptations of Woods in Winter

Mary Ghullam



Winter is the time when all good bryologists are out in force. Most ground vegetation dies down, making it easier, especially in woodland, to see mosses and liverworts in all their glory.

Even dedicated bryologists, however, are sometimes led astray and tempted to record other things. This is what happened at a couple of recent field meetings at Drayton Drewray and Fulmodeston.

Despite finding such goodies as Little Shaggy-moss, *Rhytidiadelphus loreus*, at only its fourth known site in East Norfolk, a wealth of *Sphagna* species and Fragile Fork-moss, *Dicranum tauricum*, it was slime moulds that drew the eye at Drayton Drewray. Admittedly one was growing in abundance on Cow-horn Bog-moss, *Sphagnum denticulatum*, so there was some excuse! The delicate white fingers of the mould were later identified as probably unformed *Ceratiomyxa fruticolosa*. The second, growing on wood, was black-stalked and globose, looking as if it had been sprinkled with icing sugar. It was the not uncommon *Didymium melanospermum*.*

Then ferns got in on the act. A single example of the rare, at least in Norfolk, Lemon-scented Fern, *Oreopteris limbosperma*, stood out because of its yellowing leaves. Fine specimens of Hard-fern, *Blechnum spicant*, sporting their separate fertile fronds, bordered the site.

There were no slime moulds to be seen at Fulmodeston to distract the bryologists, but Woodruff, *Galium odoratum*, carpeted the woodland floor in many places. The site, however, allowed close comparison of the differences between both Shield-ferns *Polystichum aculeatum* and *P. setiferum*, as they grew together. One disgruntled? bryologist was heard to say that the group should change its name to the Cryptogamic Group!

* My thanks to Terry Easter for identifications and descriptions.

Leaf Retention of Deciduous Trees in Lowestoft

Colin Jacobs

During the opening week of December 2011 I was visiting my local sites in Lowestoft (TM59), recording for the Wild Flower Society (WFS) winter hunt, which involves recording plants in flower between December and February. I had over fifty species recorded within a four mile square. The area included three woodlands, two sadly, which have been “managed” by local volunteer community schemes now have few ruderal weeds and a very poor flora than previously. One such wood, Foxburrow, the work was thankfully banned from being managed by these groups before any damage was done and still remains one of North Suffolk’s leading woods for ancient woodland indicators and locally uncommon spring flowers such as Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, Wood Sorrel *Oxalis arce-tosella*, Wood Millet *Milium effusum* and some of the best Holly *Ilex aquifolium* trees in the district. One of the most common sightings this week was the amount of deciduous trees and shrubs that remained in full green leaf: Penunculate Oak *Quercus robur*, Beech. *Fagus sylvatica*, Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa* Hazel *Corylus avellana* and Elder *Sambucus nigra*.

At the time of writing the temperatures have plummeted from an average of 12 to 14° C to 2 to 4° C so one expects full leaf fall. In most cases 70% of the leaves remained green and healthy.

In Lowestoft town centre where the mean temperature would and did remain slightly higher than the woodlands leaves of deciduous trees, planted or otherwise, dropped their leaves as per normal. It was amusing to see that the local council workers were unable to find the time to sweep up the large piles of fallen leaves due to continued grass cutting. Good for their extended contract period but poor for the health and safety people. I await complaint letters in the local press about the former.

A Cricket Surprise

Hans Watson



On the 21st September 2011, I saw what I at first thought was an Oak Bush-cricket walking up the inside of one of my conservatory windows. When I went to remove it to the garden I was very surprised to see that it was a female Long-winged Conehead, a species that I did not know existed in my area of East Norfolk. I removed it to a rough area of the garden that is planted with wild flowers, and was able to photograph it in more natural surroundings. As a youngster I remember being told “In nature, expect the unexpected”, and how true this is. I now wonder if any eggs were laid in the garden, and must remember to be vigilant next year for other specimens.

A Mystery Insect

Ian Johnson



My wife has always been interested in insects and even collected butterflies and dragonflies as a girl. Once she kept a queen wasp all winter in the spare room. “Come and look at this” she says, showing some curiosity or other in a Perspex jar, leading to an identification troll through the plates of our insect books, not always successfully. Last October she produced a real oddity with a body nearly an inch long, which she had found while dusting. Failing to identify it, we freed it in our Stibbard garden.

“It’s back again” she said a day or two later, so I photographed it on 3rd October before releasing it. Clearly it was the same species but possibly not the same individual, even if in the same bedroom. This happened again a couple of times in other rooms, so perhaps it was like those determined peacock or small tortoiseshell butterflies which come indoors to hibernate. Still we could not put a name to it so we released it.

Then she found another one indoors on 19th December so I sent the photo by email to Francis Farrow who kindly identified it and referred me to the web site www.britishbugs.org.uk, to which I am indebted for most of the following. It was an adult Western Conifer Seed Bug (*Leptoglossus occidentalis*), one of the true bugs (Hemiptera: Coreidae), which was first recorded in England in 2007 and has since been seen increasingly from the Channel Islands as far as north Wales and Northumberland.

This bug is native to western north America, where it is a serious pest of conifer seed nurseries. The adults and nymphs eat the flowers, cones and seeds, especially of pines but also a wide range of other conifers. It has since spread east and south until it now is found widely in Canada, the USA and Mexico. It seems it was accidentally introduced into north Italy in 1997, since spreading quickly as far as Spain and Poland, an example of the risks of global trade, especially in plants. So far no problems have been identified in Europe, but let us wait and see, for the spread of this insect seems irresistible.

It is a striking insect, not only because it is so large. It has long antennae and legs with “a large expansion on the hind tibiae,” a feature we looked for but failed to find in the plates. This shows in the photo, together with the “white zigzag mark across the centre of the forewings.” Thankfully, it “does not bite or sting” though it looks formidable. Apparently it is attracted to light and may hibernate indoors. Most of the early records were made at light traps along our south coast, indicating widespread migration across the channel from 2008 onwards. So, we have a new member of the British fauna.

Welney

Tony Howes



Three of us left Thorpe heading for Welney, the forecast had been good, bright conditions, ideal for a day's photography but as we neared our destination cloud began to build, not a good sign. We arrived early and put the time to good use by driving down some of the lanes in the area looking for our quarry – Whooper and Bewick swans feeding out on the fields. Later they would fly into the washes, in front of the hides, and spend the night on the water.

When in the reserve, birds seen on the water were Mallard, Gadwall, Pochard, Greylag and Pintail; waders on the small islands included B/T Godwit, Curlew and Lapwing. We were unlucky in that very few Whoopers came in and even fewer Bewicks, but we did get some images of these beautiful birds. At one point, sitting way off, on a gate, were two Peregrine falcons, there was certainly no shortage of potential food for them.

Just at dusk a young lady came out with a barrow full of corn, she commented on the swans and the general setup at Welney as she distributed the evening meal. Unfortunately, by then, it was too dark for good photography but it had still been an enjoyable day.

Strumpshaw Diary + Cley

Brian Macfarlane



As I write this latest offering in January 2012 I am frustratingly sitting in my lounge suffering from another chest infection. The morning dawned clear and sunny with wall to wall blue sky. It's now 2pm and the weather is still like a summers day. Luckily my wife has got the same problem so we are a 'RIGHT PAIR' commiserating together!

How different the weather compares with last November and December. Most of that time it was very cold with snow and ice with waxwings in abundance.

Having reported in the last *Natterjack* that the bird population had increased outside the fen hide since the middle of September, I have to say it is deadly quiet again. The only large number of birds recently have been the Starling roost where reportedly there have been as many as 40,000. This year has attracted many people, but have been disappointed because the birds have flown straight into the reeds. In past years the birds have swirled around in dense clouds giving spectacular views.

A lot more reeds have been cut back outside the hides making it possible to see the Bitterns walking about. Also a lot more Pheasants are seen feeding in the open spaces. They obviously know where to be safe from the shooting that takes place each week.

Chinese Water Deer have been seen regularly, but not in the numbers seen in previous years. Although the Heron has stopped fishing outside the fen hide, it appears successful in front of the reception hide. Several large Pike have been caught, and on one occasion a Heron 'downed' a very large Pike, an hour later it caught an even bigger fish. It took it to the bank and killed it, but it looked too big to swallow so it dropped in the water and flew off.

I was fortunate to see a male Hen Harrier fly past the hide, and several females have been seen in recent weeks. I can only report what I see, but several of my friends have been very quick to inform me of what they have seen. Despite going 125 times in 2011 you have to be in the right place at the right time! Well you win some and loose some!

Cley Marshes

I have visited a couple of times before Christmas, and both times were extremely cold with a strong Westerly wind. I sat in Daukes' Hide so the wind was behind me. Lots of people came in looking for the Western Sandpiper. Unless you had a telescope or good binoculars it was a distant object to identify. There were plenty of Green and Golden plovers, and they frequently took to the air in their hundreds. A pair of swans spent hours washing and preening so I concentrated on them.

I made a short trip to the Bishop hide, and saw a Little Grebe fishing in front of the hide. Further over a Snipe was feeding vigorously, but there was little else near by.

I went on to Salthouse hoping to see Snow Buntings, but no luck. I managed a few shots of the Turnstones flipping the stones into the air in search of food.

Winter in the Yare Valley

Tony Howes



Whitlingham Great Broad is a lovely stretch of water to visit, the circular walk is about a mile, but I tend to stay on the southern shore and many different water birds can be seen from there. When there is freezing weather the local ducks and geese keep an area open, where people tend to feed them, and this also attracts unusual visitors. Just recently a Goosander was mixing in with the 'rabble', and this beautiful male sawbill spent several days fishing. Two winters back a Great

Northern Diver spent some time there and I have also seen Golden eye, Smew and Mergansers during the winter months.

Further downstream at Strumpshaw, Bitterns have been showing well this winter, they can be observed from any of the hides, usually flying from one feeding place to another, but if you are really lucky, one on the ground is possible. A couple of weeks back I was fortunate enough to see one walk out of the reeds into the open and it spent some time fishing on the edge of the dyke, catching small items of food, tiny fish, probably infant Roach or Rudd. It was also stretching up to resemble a bunch of reeds, these charismatic birds are masters of camouflage and in a reed bed just merge so well, you wouldn't know they were there.

The Marsh Harriers have also been active of late, several are still around, and they can be observed quartering the fen looking for Moorhen, Water Vole or anything edible. A lovely sight as they drift into the wind with the characteristic V shaped wings, rocking from side to side as they edge forwards against the breeze.

The Apple trees along the river bank at Strumpshaw had a good crop again last year and at the moment all those fallen fruit are being consumed by Moorhen, Pheasant, Blackbird and Chinese Water Deer. The Spindle trees also had a good crop, these pink coloured fruits are a firm favourite of the thrush tribe, Robins also love them.

There is always lots to see during the winter months in the Yare valley.

A Wader Autumn

Hans Watson



Most birdwatchers have their favourites. For some it is raptors, or wildfowl, or warblers etc. For me it has always been waders, and so I always look forward to the months from July to October when waders pass through Norfolk from their breeding grounds in the far north to their wintering grounds. For some of these birds, Norfolk will be as far south as they intend to travel, and so we have the pleasure of being able to see these all through the winter until they depart in spring for breeding grounds in the north. The autumn of 2011 will no doubt be remembered as one of the best migrant wader autumns of the last two decades, at least. This applies to the Yare valley, as well as the more popular sites for bird-watching around the coast. Because I live on the edge of the Yare valley, I tend to do more of my bird-watching here than at the coastal sites, and am fortunate to be able to use one of my small portable hides at the edge of some ponds that are favoured by passage waders. This means that instead of watching the waders at 50 to 100 meters with binoculars or telescope, I have the thrill of watching them at about 5 meters. At this close distance all the quiet little calls that a flock of

Dunlins, Little Stints or other waders make whilst feeding can be heard, as well as the swish of their wings as they flit past the hide. On several days in August and September it was possible for me to watch a dozen species of wader in a three hour period, and as I have noticed in previous years, when larger than usual numbers of Curlew Sandpipers arrive, they are followed by Pectoral Sandpipers. For me 2011 will be remembered as my best year for Pectoral Sandpipers with up to 7 frequenting the Buckenham and Cantley area.

Request for Information and Records

Butcher's Broom *Ruscus aculeatus*

A request for information on planting and historical use in East Suffolk vc25.

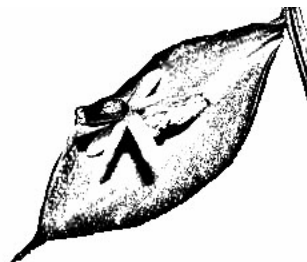
Colin Jacobs

35 Milton Road East, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1NU

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Ever since I was a young child I have been fascinated by the shrub Butcher's Broom *Ruscus aculeatus*. Luckily in my county of Suffolk vc25 and especially in the north of the county, TM59 and nearby 10k squares, my own study area small patches or single shrubs exist. I am therefore trying to find out the history of the shrub, it's uses in history (ie sweeping butchers tables) with pictorial or written or anecdotal evidence perhaps and any proof nationally of the plant being native. There is some discussion amongst Suffolk Naturalists about the provenance of Butchers Broom and most records (they say) probably relate to planted specimens. But why? If they were planted, why in old hedgerows or ancient woodlands well away from houses? If the shrub was used to sweep butchers tables why do we not see the long living, and slow growing plant in or near to Butcher's shops.

I am looking for any illustrations, photographs and anecdotal evidence of the plants use and records other than out and out plantings particularly within and possibly outside Suffolk and reasons why one thinks these plants are native or planted. Any postage will be refunded and I would like permission to use the information in a planned paper on the subject including any photographs or illustrations I may use. All items will be credited.



Butcher's Broom cladode

Calling all photographers....

As we are all aware nowadays camera technology is incredible so that most of us just 'point and shoot' allowing the camera to work out all the exposure and focusing for us. Many of us get excellent images this way and I include myself as such a snapper. Occasionally though I will try to extend my knowledge and use the camera with a more 'hands on' approach. The great thing with digital cameras is that experimentation costs nothing - gone are the days when a roll of Kodak 64 slide film would require that just about every shot would count due to the high cost of just getting a maximum of 36 exposures!



So this coming year - be brave and get to grips with your camera's technology and make 2012 the year you send an image or two to 'Natterjack'. We have some great wildlife in Norfolk and even many a garden offers a unique photographic opportunity. If you have never sent an image to 'Natterjack' make it a late New Years resolution to do so.

'Natterjack' is a members newsletter and as such can be an outlet for all your ideas and creativity regarding Norfolk's wonderful biodiversity and landscape - Nats' Gallery can reflect your endeavours.

'A picture is worth a thousand words' so they say, however, Simon, our picture editor, would like a basic description - such as 'What, Where and maybe Why?' If you like you could also send in an article to accompany the image(s), however, this is not compulsory.

So as the days lengthen and hopefully the sun shines its time to get out and about snapping elusive wildlife or atmospheric scenes. Even if you do not always achieve the result the first time you still will probably have fun trying or at the very least have a grand day out in the Norfolk countryside.

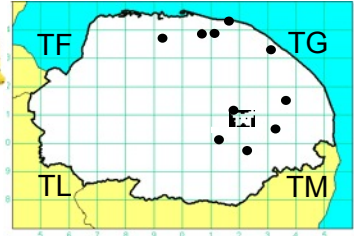
Francis Farrow
Editor



Excursion

Reports

- 2011-12 Field Meeting location
- St. Andrew's Hall Eaton
- Indoor meetings



Walsingham - NNNS Beginner's Bryology Meeting Saturday 29th October, 2011



On what initially promised to be a dull and damp day, a select group of moss enthusiasts assembled – in dribs and drabs – at the St. Mary's parish church in Little Walsingham, for what had been billed as a Beginners meeting.

The finally assembled group included one complete novice, two relatively inexperienced enthusiasts, and a collection of old lags from the regular Bryology Group meetings. This made for a good combination, since it meant that 'Instruction' to the beginners could be shared out, allowing them to benefit from the experience of several people, rather than just one.

St. Mary's has had 33 species recorded from it but on this occasion only 31 were found, however, they did include 3 species new to the site, viz. *Bryum dichotomum*, *Dicranella staphylina* and *Pellia epiphylla*. The latter was an especially useful additional find, since it enabled the beginners to see a high proportion of the common thallose liverworts of the county all in one place, viz. *Marchantia polymorpha*, *Lunularia cruciata* and the *Pellia*. We also found an abundance of *Pseudocrossidium revolutum*, which is confined to old limestone, and therefore almost exclusively found in churchyards and cemeteries.



Wood Mouse

An interesting, although non-bryological find was of a large hoard of cherry stones under a cherry tree, all of which showed signs of having been gnawed by Wood Mice. There were also large numbers of Harlequin ladybirds about, in the usual range of colour morphs.

From the churchyard we then followed a public footpath across some rather dull grassland, before reaching a road that led us back into Walsingham. The margins of a ploughed field held our attention briefly, whilst a stubble field held it for somewhat longer. Stubble fields can hold an interesting range of small bryophytes

whose life cycle is adapted to the frequent disturbance caused by ploughing and cultivation. This particular field proved somewhat dull, only eight species being found, all of which were common.

Progressing on into the village, a variety of walls were peered at, before a suitably low wall was located on which bottoms could be parked, and lunches consumed. The party then walked on to St Peter's church in Great Walsingham, pausing occasionally to look at vascular plants. Notable amongst these were the leaves of Milk Thistle *Silybum marianum*. The white markings on the leaf were supposed to have been caused by milk leaking from the breast of the Virgin Mary, making it a very appropriate plant to find in Walsingham. What was also noteworthy was the frequency, in several places, of Common Calamint *Clinopodium ascendens* whilst Vervain *Verbena officinalis*, occurred in the chalk pit visited at the end of the day.

The church, which is on the outskirts of the village, was very exposed and very well managed – which is not a good combination for mosses – so only nineteen species were recorded. One of these, however, was probably the most interesting find of the day – the rock dwelling *Schistidium confertum*, which was only the second record for the county. By far the greatest excitement, however, was caused by Alex Prendergast who trod on a wasp's nest; the wasps were not amused, and showed it, but Alex was able to make a rapid escape without getting stung.

The party then walked back into Little Walsingham where a brief pause for a cup of tea helped revive flagging spirits and tired feet, before we all drove to the last stop of the day, an old chalk pit near Houghton St. Giles.

Negotiating our way through an elderly horse and several sheep, we made our way to some sunny exposed chalk faces. These were very dry and few signs of any bryophytes were seen, let alone any of the 'nice' species we had hoped for. Fruiting *Aloina aloides* and *Dicranella varia*, both found by Mary Ghullam, were the only species found on the 'sunny side of the street'. The shady side, however, proved more fruitful and several interesting species, such as *Neckera complanata*, *Radula complanata* and *Zygodon viridissimus* were found on tree roots and bases, along with a rather dingy looking little moss, which was collected out of a sense of duty, rather than anything else. However, once examined under the microscope at home it appeared to key out as *Didymodon acutus*, which would have been a new county record. It was duly sent to the Bryological Society expert in the genus, who agreed with the identification; after this it was sent to the Recorder of Mosses, who acts as the supreme arbiter in these matters. He, alas, rejected the identification and identified it as an unusual form of a much commoner species, *Didymodon vinealis*. Identifying mosses is not always an easy task!

Robin Stevenson

AGM

March 13th 2012 - St Andrew's Hall, Eaton - 7.30pm
followed by the 'Natural History of Green Lanes' a talk by Mike Toms



NOTE:
New email
address for
Simon !!!

The next issue of '*The Norfolk Natterjack*' will be May 2012.
Please send all articles and notes to the editor as soon as possible by

April 1st 2012 to the following address:

Francis Farrow, 'Heathlands', 6 Havelock Road, Sheringham,
Norfolk, NR26 8QD Email: francis.f@virgin.net

Please send **all photographic material** to:
Simon Harrap, 1 Norwich Road, Edgefield,
Melton Constable, Norfolk, NR22 2RP
Email: simon@norfolknature.co.uk

Membership subscriptions

The N&NNS membership year runs from 1st April to 31st March.
During this time members will receive four copies of the quarterly
Natterjack newsletter, and annual copies of the Transactions of the
Society, and the Norfolk Bird & Mammal Report.

Membership renewals are due on *1st April each year* and should be sent
to the treasurer:

- David Richmond, 42 Richmond Rise, Reepham, Norfolk, NR10 4LS.

New memberships should be sent to:

- Mike Stew, 'Sandpipers', The Street, Kelling, Norfolk, NR25 7EL.

Current rates are £15 for individual, family and group memberships
(£25 for individuals living overseas).

Cheques payable to: Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society.

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National Moth Night 2012

This year Moth Night 2012 will be taking place on **21st-23rd June 2012**. The theme is the moths of brownfield habitats (such as old quarries, disused railway lines, reclaimed coal tips, gravel and clay workings etc.) and includes both daytime searches and the usual night-time recording. Further announcements will follow in due course on the Moth Night website (www.nationalmothnight.info).

Illustrations:

Cladode (page 7) *Computer / Clipart*. Photographer Cartoons (page 8) - *Kevin Radley*, Wood Mouse (page 9) - *Thelma Macfarlane*