



THE NORFOLK - 4 DEC 1984
NATTERJACK

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

No. 6

August, 1984

A CALL TO AIMS

Within the last two weeks I have received two letters which dovetail rather nicely. One was from the Charity Commission which, in connection with our application for charitable status, asks several questions, one of which is 'In what way does the Society protect endangered species and to whom are the results of surveys and investigations made available?' The other letter accompanied a discussion document jointly from the Norfolk County Council, The Norwich City Council and the South Norfolk District Council entitled 'The Future of the River Yare Valley at Colney, Bowthorpe and Bawburgh'. To quote from this last, "Whilst none of this stretch of the Yare valley is of sufficient wildlife importance to justify formal protection, nevertheless, based on earlier work by the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society, three main areas are of ecological interest: (a) Colney Wood, which contains a wide range of plant life; (b) Colney/Bawburgh Gravel Pits, important for their range of bird life. Some of their ecological value is temporary, reflecting changing conditions as the quarrying proceeds, and thus their value, particularly in terms of acclimatising plant communities, will change as extraction is completed; (c) Colney/Earlham marshes, improved grazing marshes with a range of marshland species.' The document proposes three options (more of which in another time and place) but in passing says, "Any future proposals for the area should respect the ecological value of Colney Woods and the grazing marshes of Colney/Earlham."

It is conceivable that the planners' options owe nothing to the Society's work, but given the pattern of their recommendations and their comments, it seems unlikely. It is good, therefore, to see (as Roy Baker puts it) that 'the Yare Valley Survey has come of age to the planners'. It also underlines that one of the chief values of the Society to the community in which we live is to nourish and use the biological skills we command. Expertise is a wasting asset: experts grow old or move away, and it behoves all of us to polish up our little corner of knowledge, and to steer the Society into gaining and using its resources of understanding nature.

G. D. W.

MOSSYMERE WOOD - May 20th, 1984

Twenty-eight members enjoyed a walk in Mossymere Wood, Saxthorpe -- an area of open glades, conifer plantations, old oak/chestnut woodland and overgrown coppiced/scrub. In this undulating countryside bluebells carpeted the woodland floor, but the main interest was centred on the extensive regeneration of bird cherry. This was in full bloom and a beautiful sight as we walked along the rides. Early purple orchid, twayblade, yellow pimpernel and crosswort were among other plants seen. The prolific breeding of the grey squirrel was evident from the

many corpses seen on the 'gibbet'. A dead pigmy shrew was found on one of the paths. Birds seen or heard included the cuckoo, blackcap, willow warbler, turtle dove and nuthatch. In spite of recent dry weather, Reg. Evans and Co. found at least 40 items of interest. Speculation as to the origin of a very large hole in the ground, known locally as Devil's Dish, was also of great interest.

Anne Brewster

Roy Baker supplies the following account found in the Geological Memoirs for the area:

"In 1718 Mr. P. Le Neve gave "An Account of the Sinking of three Oaks into the Ground at Manington in the County of Norfolk." This may refer to some of the large holes in Mossymere Wood. The occurrence took place on Tuesday, July 23rd, 1717, in the grounds of Sir Charles Potts Bart., in the parish of Manington, "in the day time, to the great astonishment of those that were present; first, one single Oak, with the Roots and Ground about it, was seen to subside and sink into the Earth, and not long after, at about 40 yards distance, two other Oaks that were contiguous, sunk after the same manner, into a much larger Pit; being about 33 Foot Diameter, whereas the former is not fully 18.... When the first Tree sunk, it was observed, that the Water boyl'd up in the Hole; but upon the sinking of the greater Pit, that Water drain'd off into it, from the former, which now continues dry. The depth thereof to the firm Bottom is nine Foot three Inches;... In the Bottom of the greater Pit, there is a Pool of Water about 8 Foot Diameter, whose Surface is 11 Foot 3 Inches below the Ground.... The soil on which these Trees grew, is Gravelly; but the Bottom is a Quick-sand over a Clay, upon which there are Springs, which feed large Ponds adjoining to Sir Charles Potts' House, at about a quarter of a Mile from these Holes. The Nature of the Soil seems to afford us a reasonable conjecture at the Cause of this odd accident, which some perhaps may be apt to reckon as a Prodigy. The Springs running over the Clay at the bottom of a Bed of very minute Sand, such as your Quicksands usually are, may reasonably be supposed in many Ages to have washt away the Sand, and to have thereby excavated a kind of Subterranean Lake, over which these Trees grew: And the force of the Winds on their Leaves and Branches, agitating their Roots, may well have loosened the Sand, under them, and occasioned it to fall in, more frequently than elsewhere; whereby in length of time the thin Bed of Gravel being only left, it might become unable to support its own weight and that of the Trees it bore."

PUBLIC EXHIBITION MEETING

It is planned to hold a public exhibition meeting in the Ivory Room at the Assembly House from 10.30 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. on Saturday, February 16th, 1985. The exhibition will be aimed at attracting new members to the Society and will show the part played by members within the Society -- the types of excursions we hold; the part we play in organising studies of particular areas; the specialist groups, for our own interest both individually or collectively -- and serving local and national bodies outside the Society -- such as the river valley surveys, bird or plant atlas work, etc. Suggestions would be welcome, and especially offers of help or of exhibition material.

Alec Bull.

WHIN COMMON, DENVER - June 3rd, 1984

About 23 members attended. This was the second joint meeting with The Denver, Fordham, Roxham and Ryston Village Trust, the first being on Feb. 26th, 1984, when only seven of our members attended. The idea of this second meeting was to list as many as possible of the plant and animal species of Whin Common, and at a later meeting to do the same on the other commons in Denver. The common has a lot of gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) hence the name Whin Common. It was a dull day which turned into a beautiful sunny one. We were lucky to have our lunch on Mr. Sharp's lawn with seats for all. In the afternoon the members of the Village Trust had invited us to the old Pump House at Fordham which they had opened just to show us: they also ran

the Pump engine. They had laid on tea and cakes for us, and a very good day was enjoyed by all. I would like to thank all who helped with the listing, particularly Reg. and Lil. Evans, Rex and Barbara Hancy, Mike and Richard Poulton, and Geoff Watts, and all the others who attended this meeting. The lists include 97 flowering plants (incl. 14 grasses, 2 rushes, 2 sedges), 1 fern, 3 mosses, 19 fungi, 2 mammals, 27 birds, 16 insects and 9 plant galls. The lists have been lodged with the Databank at the Castle Museum.

Colin Dack

TRANSPORT

The following members have no transport and would be glad of a lift to meetings where convenient:

Mr. Michael Barker, 14, Hook's Hill Road, Sheringham

Mr. D. Otter, 2 Fountain Cottages, Kilverstone.

WEYBOURNE - June 13th, 1984

The Society's first daytime midweek meeting was considered to be a success by the 16 members who attended, and there was a general request that the experiment be repeated in next year's programme. The morning session was to the west, in front of the old 'camp', over short grass carpeted with Bird's-foot Trefoil and Dark-green Mouse-ear Chickweed, most of whose tiny starry flowers had four petals although a few with five. It was of interest to see how slight variations in situation and habitat affected the size of plants of Buck's-horn Plantain. In open sandy places the plants were small while in sheltered spots some were very large. The effect of the recent long series of fresh to strong northerly winds could be seen by the burning back of Field Convolvulus where it had encroached onto the shingle beach, and of Common Horsetail among the grass for about 20 yards back from the splash zone. At lunch time we also noticed that a barley field had had the first 20 yards or so completely burnt off by salt spray. The nicest plant proved to be the tiny Subterranean Clover which was frequent in several places. We were also pleased to find, in a depression behind the beach, an area of salting thickly clothed with the pink-flowered Sea Milkwort or Black Saltwort, and studded here and there with the larger flowers of two species of Sea Spurrey. Three species of butterfly were met with - Wall Brown, Small Heath and Common Blue, the latter being especially abundant. Ladybirds were also plentiful, these being mostly 7-spot, though we did find one of the larger *Anatis ocellata* which has a variable number of spots, each with a narrow yellow ring round them. From time to time Little, Common, and Sandwich Terns flew past but pride of place must go to a pair of Stonechats which, by their behaviour, were nesting in the area.

After lunch we walked along the base of the cliffs towards Sheringham as far as a low place which enabled us to scramble up and return along the cliff top. The strata in the cliff face itself was very interesting, and clearly exposed by recent falls. In places Colin Dack pointed out to us where the bedding planes had been turned over on themselves by the force of grinding ice during the last glaciation. Some of the softer parts of the cliff were being exploited by pairs of Fulmars, about ten pairs of which were on their ledges and were mostly very confiding. We were also treated to many displays of their superb mastery of the air currents along the cliff face. In view of their relative scarcity this year, due to adverse conditions in their winter quarters in the Sahel region of Africa, we were also pleased to find a colony of Sand Martins in residence, 55 nest holes being counted. The tideline, however, was as unpleasant as many of us could remember, being a wide band of plastic containers of various sizes, glass - mostly broken, wood, rope, cut-away fishing net, oil, cod's heads and back-bones picked clean by the gulls, a ray's back-bone and barbed tail, and several dead birds including three Guillemots not long dead as all were in summer plumage and all had been oiled. Also the skeleton and feathers of a Bar-tailed Godwit which had presumably died during last autumn's migration. Leaving this behind we scrambled to the cliff top where we found ourselves in the middle of a sea of pink Thrift in full bloom. Walking back to the car park, we

were hardly ever out of earshot of a singing Corn Bunting since not less than three singing birds were spaced out at intervals within about a hundred yards of the cliff edge. Just as we arrived back a party of five Turtle Doves flew west just offshore indicating that in this late season, some birds are still passing through.

Alec Bull

SOME BYGONE NORFOLK NATURALISTS - 4

Robert Marsham 1708 - 1797

The three naturalists who featured in the earlier studies - Smith, Turner and Hooker - were very much of their time. It's not surprising that, in an age when botany was very much the fashion, their interests should follow that direction. However, Robert Marsham was a pioneer. As an early example of that very English class of country squire and nature-lover he set, rather than pursued, the fashion of informal landscape gardening, and consistently recorded natural phenomena over the span of his long life.

We know that he was born on Jan. 27th, 1708, but little is known of his early years. Yet we learn that at the age of ten he was planting acorns, and one oak which was planted when he was 12 he measured in old age 70 years later. In Feb., 1728, Marsham went up to Clare College, Cambridge. There is no evidence of his acquiring a degree and on leaving university he returned to his father's house at Stratton Strawless. Here he pursued his country interests and in 1736 began compiling annual tables of the 'Indications of Spring' which he continued till his death. The journals which include the 'Indications' record the weather month by month, and daily incidents of both natural and general interest. Each year he observed 27 phenomena - the leafing of sycamore, oak, chestnut and lime; the flowering of hawthorn, turnip and wood anemone; the singing of the thrush and nightingale; and the building of rook's nests, to name but a few. The 'Indications' were communicated to the Royal Society in 1789. While the scientific value of some of the phenomena may be questioned the series undoubtedly reveals an interesting record of the passing seasons two centuries ago. Marsham tells us of the "three winter year" of 1754 when large numbers of livestock and birds perished, and the hot summer of 1757 when the temperature reached about 86 degs. in mid-July.

After Cambridge he pursued tree-planting in earnest. Although his estate was not large he planted many of his favourite beeches and, on poorer land, Scots pine, spruce and silver fir. In 1743 he began recording the annual growth of ten species of trees and communicated his findings to the Royal Society. He began experimenting with ways to increase the growth of his beeches by washing and scrubbing their trunks with water and a stiff shoe-brush. He found that this operation, when performed several times a week throughout the summer, caused an increase in growth.

Marsham continued planting and studying trees into old age, but a fresh impetus was given to his life in 1790 when he bought a copy of Gilbert White's 'Natural History of Selborne'. The effect on Marsham was profound. He wrote a long letter to White describing his observations and the two men continued their correspondence until the latter's death three years later. They obviously derived the greatest pleasure from their exchanges. Marsham wrote of his trees, the weather, the migration of woodcocks and herons, the indications of spring and a strange bird which became the first British record of the wallcreeper. Marsham died on Sep. 4th, 1797. Most of his estate was felled during the 1914-18 war.

Michael Bean

LANDGUARD COMMON, FELIXSTOWE - July 1st, 1984

Eleven members undertook the long journey to the southern extremity of Felixstowe and were rewarded by a sunny day which showed the flowering plants at their best. Many of the Landguard specialities associated with the shingle

and stabilised dunes were seen, although most of the early annuals had passed over. However, a few flowers were lingering on Ranunculus parviflorus which apparently became extinct in Norfolk in the late nineteenth century. Other noteworthy finds, or those which excited greatest interest among the participants, were: Brassica nigra, Diplotaxis tenuifolia, Crambe maritima (in great quantities), Barbarea verna, Sisymbrium orientale, Tamarix gallica, Moenchia erecta, Sagina maritima, Medicago minima (in fruit), Trifolium ornithopodioides, T. suffocatum, Vicia lutea, Lathyrus nissolia, Rosa rubiginosa, Sedum anglicum, S. album, Crithmum maritimum, Euphorbia paralias, Rumex tenuifolius, R. pulcher, Armeria maritima, Echium vulgare (forming blue expanses beside Landguard Road), Calystegia soldanella, Hyoscyamus niger (in profusion), Marrubium vulgare, Inula conyza, Dittrichia viscosa, Carduus tenuiflorus (abundantly), Anthemis cupaniana ssp. punctata, Onopordum acanthium, Leontodon taraxacoides, Lactuca serriola and L. virosa.

One of the most remarkable features of the Landguard flora is the wealth of grass species and those seen included Vulpia fasciculata, V. bromoides, V. myuros, V. ciliata ssp. ambigua, Desmazeria rigida, D. marina, Cynosurus echinatus, (in sheets), Bromus diandrus, B. madritensis, B. erectus, B. hordaceus ssp. thominii, B. commutatus, Elymus pycnanthus, E. farctus, Parapholis incurva and P. strigosa.

The moderate south-easterly breeze meant few butterflies on the wing, although glimpses were had of Meadow Brown, Small Heath and Common Blue. Brambles defoliated by larvae of the Brown Tail Moth were examined and several Garden Tiger caterpillars were discovered feeding on Malva sylvestris and Melilotus officinalis.

Arthur Copping

CONSERVING ROADSIDE VERGES

In the last issue of 'Natterjack' we listed 51 roadside verges selected from about 240 verges identified and recorded during the Society survey several years ago as worthy of conservation. In response to our invitation for members to become voluntary wardens and adopt one or more of these roadside stretches we are grateful for the following offers:

Anne Brewster	Nos. 41, 43, 45, 46	Lil Evans	Nos. 12, 35
Dr. Ruth Hadman	Nos. 16, 20, 21, 23, 26, 27, 28, 38		
Richard Harmer	No. 36	Mary Kett & Leslie Swindells	Nos. 7, 25
Dr. Charles Petch	Nos. 10, 15	Cathy Proudlove	No. 19
Alan Scowen	Nos. 17, 18		

This is a very encouraging start covering nearly half of the sites so far on offer, but we would be glad of lots more offers of help with the sites not so far taken up, or even offers of a general nature. Meanwhile there is a lot of work to be done in re-sorting the sites geographically so that wardens can be put in touch with a local cluster of sites, and an organisation built up from parish level. There is the probability of help from one or other branch of the local authority for marking sites, and we are corresponding about management agreements which are now some years old and probably no longer functional. Certainly some good sites have been wiped out in the years between, and we are too far into this season to do more than keep an eye on things and look to a developing organisation by next year.

G. D. W.

CARLTON MARSHES, CARLTON COLVILLE - July 8th, 1984

A select group of naturalists crossed into Suffolk to see the tiny gem of a reserve managed by R. Briggs for the Suffolk Trust. It comprises grazing marsh, carr, reedbed and two small broads, all saved in the nick of time from arable development.

It was certainly worth saving for its aquatic plants alone.

In the first dyke we met three of the four British duckweeds, and a little further on we saw all three 'freshwater buttercups' available in these parts - Ranunculus lingua, R. flammula and R. sceleratus. We examined Hornwort, Bladderwort, Sweetgrass and Reed Canary-grass, and fished Potamogeton friesii from the water. On the marshes, which are grazed and cut, we saw Adder's-tongue fern. At the back of the reserve the landscaping area contains two very shallow broads, one of these so shallow that large areas of mud were exposed. These will shortly be mud-pumped to make a better habitat, although Ceratophyllum grows well in Sprats Water and Utricularia covered the Round Pond completely last year. Tench and carp wallowed in the shallows, their backs exposed to the hot sunshine, like basking crocodiles in the jungle atmosphere. The behaviour of dragonflies and damselflies attracted attention, both their territorial and egg-laying activities.

Algae in the form of Enteromorpha intestinalis almost covered some of the dykes, and the filamentous algae Tribonema and Oedogonium were draped on every leaf of the Potamogeton. In the ponds there were bits of mud surface which had floated to the surface of the water. This usually happens on rivers in spring with the blue-green alga Oscillatoria limosa and brings up a rich array of diatoms from the mud surface. In this case the skin was formed by two other species of Oscillatoria, and diatoms were almost completely absent. It is a pity that so few members visited this area, but the Suffolk Trust would welcome naturalists at Sprats Water reserve at any time, and if you are near Lowestoft it is well worth an hour or so.

?

NEW WORDS FOR OLD FRIENDS

With the completion of the Flora Europaea and the publication of the 3rd edition of Clapham, Tutin and Warburg's 'Excursion Flora', a revised nomenclature for flowering plants is creeping up on us (some of it in the last few pages). I've been through my field-worn Hubbard to bring my grass names up to date:

Bromus hordeaceus ssp. hordeaceus (B. mollis) Elymus caninus (Agropyron donianum and Elymus repens (Agropyron repens) Elymus pycnanthus (Agropyron pungens) A. caninum)
Elymus pycnanthus x E. farctus (Agropyron x obtusiusculum)
Elymus farctus (Agropyron junceiforme) Leymus arenarius (Elymus arenarius)
Festuca longifolia (Thuill.) (F. caesia) Festuca guestfalica (F. longifolia (auct. non
Festuca nigrescens (F. rubra ssp. commutata) Lolium perenne ssp. multiflorum (L. multifl.
Vulpia ciliata ssp. ambigua (V. ambigua) Vulpia fasciculata (V. membranacea)
Vulpia unilateralis (Nardurus maritimus) Puccinellia distans ssp. borealis (P. capillar.
Puccinellia distans ssp. distans (P. distans) Desmazeria rigida (Catapodium rigidum)
Desmazeria marina (Catapodium marinum) Sesleria albicans (S. caerulea)
Avenula pubescens (Helictotrichon pubescens) Avenula pratensis (Helictotrichon pratense)
Avena sterilis ssp. ludoviciana (A. ludoviciana) Koeleria macrantha (K. cristata)
Deschampsia caespitosa (D. alpina) Anthoxanthum aristatum (A. puelii)
Agrostis curtisii (A. setacea) Agrostis canina (A. canina ssp. canina)
Agrostis vinealis (A. canina ssp. montana) Agrostis capillaris (A. tenuis)
Polypogon semiverticillatus (Agrostis semiverticillata) Setaria pumila (S. glauca)
Phleum pratense ssp. bertolonii (P. bertolonii) Phleum pratense ssp. pratense (P. prater.
Phragmites australis (P. communis) Danthonia decumbens (Sieglingia decumbens)

Otherwise we are allowed to keep our Bromuses and Festucas and Poas and so on!!

G. D. W.

Contributions to the next Natterjack

should be sent to Ernest Daniels, 41, Brian Avenue, Norwich, Norfolk, NR1 2DP, to arrive not later than October 15th.