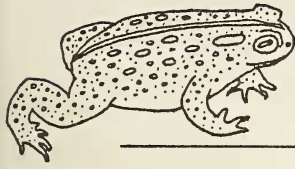


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THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

No.10

August, 1985

MANY DIMENSIONS

What image comes immediately to mind when the Society is mentioned? Some might think of a score of members in some sun-drenched woodland glade or Broadland meadow or Breckland heath: others might recall two or three score of members ranked in the Library Lecture Theatre anticipating an illustrated lecture: a few might envisage meetings of Committee or Council in the Assembly Rooms or Museum, wrestling with administration: but only those with a feeling for the abstract might try to picture a body of over 500 members scattered through the land and held together only through the post. There is a sense, I suppose, in which the Society exists in all sorts of contexts, such as a small group meeting for Society purposes (a case of where two or three are gathered in the name of the Society, there the Society is), or a letter to the newspaper over the Society name, or a Society poster advertising an event, or just a comment made by one person to another: the Society is in each of these things and is made up of all of these things.

In reviewing the first year of the Society, Joseph Crompton, the first President, said in 1870, "We have not only met with valuable specimens of natural history, but have discovered or made new friends, because we have stirred up a common interest in the beautiful works which are our study." It was a passing comment, but it underlined that the business of the Society is not only a concern for natural history, but a concern shared with other similarly concerned people. Anyone can be a student of natural history, but it takes more than one to be a society. When that society becomes rather more than a score of comfortable and familiar colleagues meeting every week or two -- when it becomes hundreds of separated members, mostly strangers except that they share common aims -- then a new administrative dimension appears; the formal business of making arrangements for people at meetings or excursions or for publications or mailings or money, or for sorting out who does what and how and when.

After the last meeting of Council there was some grumbling that the agenda had involved much administration but little natural history. In a sense this is the price for coming of age: in a large society the executive is inescapably concerned with the overall dimension, i.e. with planning and organising matters for the totality of the membership. Only when this is shipshape can there be time for less tedious pursuits.

G. D. W.

PONDWEEDS & PILLWORT

The Botanical Society of the British Isles is currently preparing a Handbook of Pondweeds (Potamogeton) and their allies, and will be accepting records for this made during the 1985 season. Records are particularly wanted for the following species which are known to occur in East Norfolk: Potamogeton acutifolius, P. coloratus, P. compressus, P. friesii, P. praelongus,

P. x salicifolius (P. lucens x P. perfoliatus), P. trichoides, P. x zizii
(P. gramineus x lucens), P. x grovesii (P. pusillus x trichoides), P. x pseudofriesii
(P. acutifolius x friesii).

As the Broads area is the most important in the country for the majority of pondweeds, it is hoped that botanists finding any of the above will send their records in, as many sites have been lost in recent years and the exact distribution of the various species is not now known, though most must be less widespread than formerly. Anyone with doubtful material should send it to Dr. N. Holmes, Old Red Brick House, Alconbury, HUNTINGDON, Cambs., if they are reasonably certain that it is one of the above. All records to me, please, giving date, location, habitat (e.g. ditch) and grid reference.

While you are looking for pondweeds, it is perhaps worth mentioning that Clive Jermy is also doing a survey on the distribution, ecology and possible conservation of the Pillwort (Pilularia globulifera) in Britain, and has sent me a list of 11 east Norfolk sites where the species was formerly found. Apart from Horsford (Dr. E.A.Ellis, 1951) and Eastfield, nr. Hickling (N.Y.Sandwith, 1926), the records are all from the 19th century, with those from Westwick and Stratton Strawless both dating from 1805 (though the latter site was still extant in 1866). The other sites mentioned are Hainford Heath, Newton St. Faiths, Horstead, Witton, Horning, Ridlington, Filby and Gt. Yarmouth. It might be worthwhile looking for suitable pillwort habitats in at least some of the above places. It should be sought on the margin of shallow pools where it is flooded in winter but is semi-dry in summer, and appears similar to very new and bright green turf, three or four inches high, with the spore receptacles about the size of peppercorns borne at the bases of the leaves. Again, any records to me, please.

Alec Bull, Hillcrest, East Tuddenham, DEREHAM, NR20 3JJ - Vice County Recorder,
East Norfolk.

OUTING TO HORSEY - June 23rd, 1985

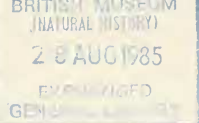
Approximately 30 members enjoyed an excursion to Horsey, rain giving way to clearer skies and even some sunshine early on. A bonus to the escorted walk around the marshes of John Buxton's estate was the boat trip he kindly arranged. Small groups took it in turns to visit the Mere where, as well as the usual mallard -- little tern, common tern, great crested grebe, reed bunting, reed warbler, bearded tit and bittern were seen. Over the marshes a female hen harrier traversed her territory, a snipe was drumming, kestrel and redpoll were seen, and a grasshopper warbler heard. Foxgloves, belladonna, woody nightshade, marsh valerian, ragged robin, yellow iris, and a profusion of creeping corydalis were noted. A woolly bear caterpillar was found, and back at the car park the appearance of a swallowtail butterfly appropriately completed the day.

Diane Robinson

PHOTOGRAPHIC GROUP

Weatherwise, these past few months of spring and early summer can by no stretch of the imagination be described as having been conducive to good nature photography. However, having sustained a full measure of rain in the first six months, I feel sure that we can with reasonable optimism look forward to a more rewarding second half of the year, and with this in mind will members please note the title of the illustrated lecture the group are committed to provide for the interest and entertainment of the main Society on Wednesday, January 29th, 1986, i.e. 'Urban Wildlife (The Unofficial Countryside)'. Pictures to match this theme will obviously have to be looked for, but with the City walls, open waste sites, and derelict buildings providing suitable habitats for botanical subject matter, and parks and gardens havens for bird, insect and other wildlife, we should obtain some interesting and possibly unusual photographs. We shall need lots and lots of slides, both by way of variety and quantity, so do your best and help us to make this a memorable year for the group, culminating in 'your' lecture to the Society.

Our 1984/85 winter session group lectures were very well attended.



The programme set out hereunder carries us through to the beginning of 1986.

- September 6th, Friday - Lecture: 'Birds with a Camera' (Tony Howes) -
Assembly House, Edmund Bacon Room, 7.30 p.m.
- October 6th, Sunday - Outing to Burnt Fen, Horning. Leader Mike Woolner.
Meet Map Ref. TG.339184 at 11.00 a.m.
- October 18th, Friday - Lecture: 'Natural History of North America' (Max Smith)
Assembly House, Kent Room, 7.30 p.m.
- November 8th, Friday - Lecture: 'My Approach to Natural History Photography' (B. Wingrove)
Assembly House, Edmund Bacon Room, 7.30 p.m.
- December 6th, Friday - Lecture: 'Nature's Creations' - audio/visual presentation
by David Macfarlane. Assembly House, Edmund Bacon Room, 7.30 p.m.
- January 29th, 1986, Wednesday - as set out above.

Please make a note of these events and dates in your diary.
Finally, with a view to increasing Society membership, why not introduce some of your camera-carrying friends to our photographic group? We will make them welcome.

Bob Robinson.

EXCURSION TO NORWICH - May 22nd, 1985

This meeting was intended to introduce members to the wildlife of Norwich. About 25 members met at Heigham Street, Norwich, on a cold overcast evening to look at the wild flora of Norwich. We walked round part of Heigham Street industrial estate to look at the flora. Owing to the late season most plants had to be identified by their foliage. Then we went to Carrow Hill to look at plants on walls. A large number of plants were seen but not in flower owing to the late season. As the meeting finished it started to rain.

Colin Dack

EXCURSION TO DENVER - June 2nd, 1985

This was a joint meeting with Denver, Fordham, Roxham and Ryston Village Trust. A large number of members met at Sluice Common, Denver, to list the wild life of the Common. Will you please let me have copies of your list?

Colin Dack

ERIC CAMPBELL

The Society lost a good friend when Eric Campbell of Great Hockham died in June at the age of 73. He was Hon. Warden of the Norfolk Naturalists' Trust property at Hockham Fen, and would frequently give up his day to lead our excursions. Without his guidance and help in securing access and keys to various rides to enable us to park off the roads, our Breckland field days would have been that much poorer. We particularly remember his leading excursions to West Harling, Hockham Fen, Fox Covert, Cranberry Rough, and especially Knight's Fen with its White Admirals and Berry Catchfly. He was a fine all-rounder and as recently as 1983 found (jointly with E.A. Ellis) the Greater Broomrape at Hills and Holes, Great Hockham -- the first Norfolk record for sixty years. He will be greatly missed.

E. T. Daniels

EXCURSION TO GOG MAGOG & CHERRY HINTON - June 9th, 1985

Regretfully the excursion to Gog Magog (for perennial flax) and Cherry Hinton (for white helleborine) had to be cancelled due to the fact that the plants we were going to see were some three weeks later than usual in coming into bloom. A 'phone call from Mrs. M. Meade of the Cambridge Naturalists' Trust, who was to be our leader, during the morning of Friday, June 7th, said there was no point in travelling the long distance to the Cambridge area as there was as yet nothing to see. That decision was as a result of a visit to the site. Consultation followed at this end and as time was so short, Radio Norfolk

was approached. They kindly broadcast this cancellation several times during the Dinner and Tea-time Shows on the Friday, and on Saturday morning in their hourly run-through of What's On and What's Off section. 'Phone calls were made to some who had expressed an interest in the meeting and they in turn passed the message on. If the message did not reach you, please accept sincere apologies.

Joyce Robinson

SOME BYGONE NORFOLK NATURALISTS - 8

John Henry Gurney (1819 - 1890)

There can be few Norfolk families that have contributed so much to the study of natural history, both on a county and national basis, than the Gurneys. J. H. Gurney, father, was to the fore in this contribution.

Born at Earlham Hall on July 4th, 1819, the only son of the leading Quaker and philanthropist, Joseph John Gurney, he showed an interest in natural history from his earliest days. At the age of 10 he went to a private tutor at Leytonstone and then onto the Friends' School at Tottenham. Yet a year before he had made his first gift to the Norwich Museum, setting a pattern which continued throughout his life. At this time he also began collecting specimens and early on compiled a list of bird species for Earlham numbering 61. Meanwhile his schoolday friends included several naturalists, among them Yarrell who, in later years, received many notes on Norfolk rarities from Gurney.

When 17 he returned to Norwich to begin work in the family's bank. Two years later we find him commencing a nature diary which included, in its first year (1838), a note on the last Norfolk bustard taken - killed near Swaffham. Very early on in these notes Gurney reveals his interest in comparing individuals of the same species from different areas. This was a study he developed in later years and which resulted in a large collection of specimens of the peregrine falcon which were, in turn, left to the Norwich Museum. Gurney was elected President of the Museum in 1849 and became Permanent President from 1869 until his death. This institution benefitted greatly from his vigorous collecting, so much so that on his death Gurney had left 395 species or subspecies of diurnal birds of prey (some 3474 specimens) and 184 species or subspecies of owls (1203 specimens). Furthermore he donated to Kings Lynn Museum a large proportion of the collection he had purchased from Alfred Wallace who had travelled extensively in the Malay Archipelago.

His contribution to ornithological literature was great. He was a regular contributor to the 'Zoologist' and, in conjunction with W. R. Fisher, published 'An Account of the Birds found in Norfolk' (1846). In 1858 he was active in the formation of the British Ornithologists' Union and, in its journal 'The Ibis' presented some of his most important work. 'A List of the Diurnal Birds of Prey' appeared in 1884.

Of course much encouragement was given to our Society, and at its first monthly meeting Gurney was elected an Honorary Member. Subsequently many of his notes and papers were published in the Transactions. Honours were bestowed by many bodies, including from America in 1883, and Moscow in 1888. But it is worth remembering that birds of prey were not his only interest. Along with the Acclimatization Society, Gurney was keen to introduce exotic species into the British Isles. Thus into Norfolk came the Japanese pheasant, and a number of wallabies which escaped from Northrepps Hall. However, his attempt to introduce the grey squirrel to the county was unsuccessful. Besides these activities he was Member of Parliament for Kings Lynn from 1854 till 1866 and, but for a brief spell in Torquay, he lived all his adult life in Norfolk. He died on April 20th, 1890, leaving a son of the same name who achieved equal eminence as a naturalist.

Michael Bean

THOMPSON COMMON

Please send all records to Anne Brewster, Four Winds, Corpusty, Norwich, NR11 6QQ, by 1st September, 1985.

Anne Brewster

EXCURSION TO THE UNIVERSITY BOTANIC GARDENS, CAMBRIDGE - June 29th, 1985

Despite all-night rain and a wet start to the journey, 16 members travelled to Cambridge for this very worthwhile visit. Fortunately the weather cleared after Thetford and eventually became very warm and sunny, which made an ideal day for such an outing (Cambridge had not had the rain).

The Garden Supervisor, who showed us round from 11.00 to 1300 hours, was an excellent guide and gave us much interesting information about individual trees and plants as we looked around the different areas of the gardens. There was much to see - the Stream, the Lake, the Water Garden, the area of Trees and Woodland, the Ecological Area representing rare British species including the rarer British plants of the eastern region, the Horticultural Beds and the Scented Garden and the Winter Garden, and the very interesting Chronological Bed. Then there were the Systematic Beds representing some 80 families of flowering plants. The Rock Gardens and Alpines were a blaze of colour. We enjoyed every minute of our guided tour and much appreciated the interesting way in which we were shown around.

After a picnic lunch in the Refreshment area - or in our own cars - we returned to look again at some of the areas which most interested us, and to go through the various glasshouses where we saw exotic plants blooming and giant ferns as well as cacti, carnivorous plants, alpines and saxifrages, etc. There was an overall beauty and peace in the grounds, where birds sang and went about their business unmindful of people, as did the grey squirrels darting around the trees and scampering up and down the tree trunks.

Joyce Robinson

NOTES FROM COUNCIL MEETINGS on March 27th and July 2nd, 1985

Formal link with the Trust - For some years a representative of the Trust has been invited to attend meetings of the Society's Committee/Council. Now the Trust has invited the Society to nominate a representative to sit on its Conservation Committee. The Council agreed that the Society Chairman should be the Society's representative unless the elected Chairman proved unable to attend afternoon meetings in which case an alternative representative should be nominated.

Co-options to Council, 1985-86 - It was agreed that representatives of the Nature Conservancy Council, the Norfolk Naturalists' Trust, the Norwich Castle Museum and the School of Biology, University of East Anglia be invited to Council meetings.

Membership of Society Standing Committees, 1985-86 -

Membership Committee - R. Hancy (Chairman), Miss J. Wakefield (Secretary), Mrs. L. Evans, R. E. Evans, E. T. Daniels, M. Woolner (co-opted), J. Goldsmith (co-opted).

Programme Committee - A. Bull (Chairman), Miss D. Robinson (Secretary), C. Dack, A. Johnson, C. Neale (co-opted), D. Fagg (co-opted).

Publications Committee - R. Jones (Chairman), Dr. A. G. Irwin (Secretary), M. J. Seago, R. Hancy, D. A. Dorling, Norfolk Ornithologists' Assn. Representative (co-opted).

Research Committee - Dr. A. J. Davy (Chairman), Mrs. A. Brewster (Secretary), A. P. Scowen, N. S. Carmichael.

Exchanges of Journals with Other Societies - It was agreed to act upon a decision taken twenty years previously to terminate all arrangements to exchange journals with other societies, but that if the University or the Museum wished to sustain exchange arrangements not in the name of the Society, the Society would provide supplies of Society journals at cost price for this purpose.

Peet Fund - In recognition of the substantial contributions made by Mr. T. Peet to the Society over the years, it was agreed to establish a 'Peet Fund' with an initial capital of £1000, further donations to be paid into the Fund; the use of the resources of the Fund to be determined as necessary by resolution of the Council.

Honorary Members & Vice-Presidents - There was a long discussion in an attempt to differentiate and define the positions of Honorary Member and of Vice-President. The Council decided that it wished to retain both positions, and set up a working party of three to draw up propositions to be presented to the October meeting.

G. D. W.

MIDWEEK EXCURSION TO BURNHAM NORTON - July 3rd, 1985

Fifteen members met at Burnham Norton to examine the wildlife of the marsh dykes and saltings. The marshes themselves were a blaze of yellow, especially those that were grazed, and it was ascertained that the yellow was provided by the flowers of the Hairy Buttercup (Ranunculus sardous) which replaces the commoner species on coastal pastures. The dykes themselves were quite clean for the present day, with a fair amount of aquatic vegetation, including two species of Water Crowfoot (Ranunculus trichophyllus and R. baudotii), Fennel Pondweed (Potamogeton pectinatus) and Spiked Water Milfoil (Myriophyllum spicatum). Though Dr. Petch had seen all four Duckweed species in the dykes locally in the past, a search of several duckweed-choked dykes revealed only the Gibbous Duckweed (Lemna gibba).

As we were crossing the marshes, a female Marsh Harrier was discovered putting a flock of Lapwing into a state of great alarm. Presently her mate appeared, carrying something in his talons. We all watched with bated breath and after a time were thrilled to see the male pass under the female, turn over onto his back and pass his prey to the female. We then watched the female as she went into a long glide and eventually landed in a quite small reed bed which had been on our intended route. However, we made a longer sortie than intended, onto the saltings, finding both common species of Sea-spurrey (Spergularia media and S. marina), Sea Pimpernel (Glaux maritima) and quite a long list of other salting plants including the uncommon little grass, Parapholis incurva.

After lunch we returned along the sea banks overlooking Overy creeks, with the lovely Grass Pea (Lathyrus nissolia) flowering all the way. Dr. Petch pointed out one of our less common sedges, Carex divisa, which only occurs in coastal marshes and meadows and, so far as flowers were concerned, we completed our round with a fine colony of Marsh Orchids (Dactylorhiza praetermissa). Among butterflies seen were one or more Painted Ladies and also the first Meadow Brown of the summer. A noticeable feature on the marshes was the lack of pigmentation in much of the Creeping Thistle. Mr. Evans investigated this and found the apparent cause to be a stem-boring grub of some kind. Other birds seen included several Yellow Wagtails, while a pair of Little Terns were seen well near the Overy backwaters.

. Alec Bull

A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY - February 23rd, 1986

The promised excursion for next February has now been arranged as follows: BIRDWATCHING EXCURSION TO BLICKLING -- Sunday, February 23rd, 1986, at 10.00 hours (note the time). Meet in the fisherman's car park at TG.179296. Walk round Blickling Lake. Joint excursion with the Norwich R.S.P.B. group.

. Alec Bull

SERIN AT WELLS FIELD STUDY CENTRE

In the early part of the summer of 1985, a cock Serin (Serinus serinus) was seen and heard by several bird-watchers in the eastern part of Wells Pinewoods. It was reported as having a very wren-like song. On the 20th June I heard what I thought was almost certainly a Serin singing in our grounds at the Field Study Centre (I am familiar with both the appearance and song of this species in France). I came indoors to fetch binoculars and by the time I got outside again the bird had moved into our Cedar where I watched it sitting on a new (green) cone. I was able to photograph it through a 400 mm. lens on June 26th while it sang from a dead branch under the canopy of the Cedar: this proved to be its most regular perch. When not there it could normally be seen or heard in Cupressus trees or on a power-line either side of the premises.

The bird was consistently present in the mornings, and often later in the day, for four weeks. Subsequently its appearance was more intermittent and, when here, its song more sporadic.

The song was generally so wren-like that I was frequently fooled by it. Sometimes it was only the presence of a singing wren nearby which provided the yardstick of comparison to check which was which. This fact, incidentally, makes it practically certain that our Serin was the one previously seen in the Pinewoods.

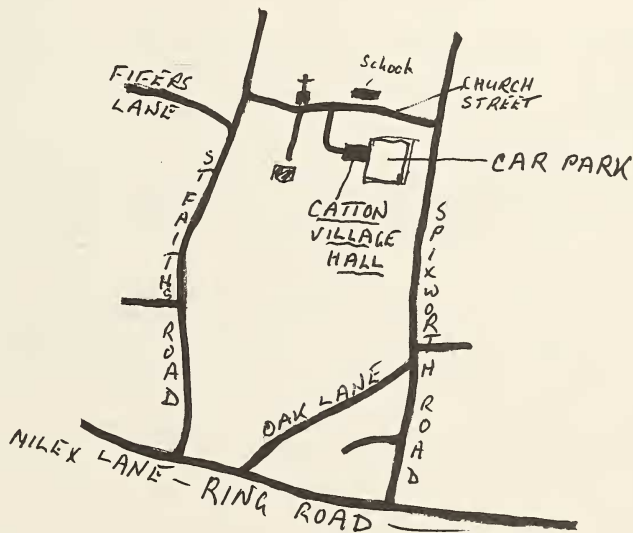
As usual, especially on the North Norfolk Coast, the grapevine soon had the twitchers here. This was the first time we had been on the receiving-end of such an invasion. On the whole they were well-behaved, but on successive weekends we had to close the gates to keep the cars out. A few of them remarked on the appropriate location that the Serin had selected, but I got the impression that most would not have recognised a Field Study Centre (or anything else apart from a new bird) if you had dangled it in front of them!

Paul Banham

CHEESE & WINE EVENING & SHOW IT YOURSELF - November 2nd, 1985

This year's Cheese & Wine & Show It Yourself meeting is moving to a new venue at Catton Village Hall. Mr. A.E. Johnson has been good enough to produce a sketch plan, reproduced herewith, giving the location of the Village Hall at Old Catton.

No excuse now for members failing to catch up with their vittles.



EXCURSION TO HILLCREST, EAST TUDDENHAM - July 17th, 1985

The evening was fairly warm but with a strong westerly wind and a sky dotted with several wisps of high cirrus cloud which sometimes obscured the sun, when eight members of the Society met at Alec and Mrs. Bull's bungalow at East Tuddenham. In the last few years Alec has been growing an increasing variety of wildflowers for seed to supply both commercial organisations and conservation bodies. The bungalow overlooks the River Tud valley and the garden and field soils range from sandy at the top of the hill, through chalky boulder clay in the middle to alluvial near the river. On these soils can be grown quite a wide range of flowers, mostly those that like cultivated and disturbed ground which have largely died out in the wild because of increasing use of herbicides and better methods of seed cleaning. Over 30 species are grown. Alec entertained us with his tales of methods of seed collection from such flowers as Corn Cockle, Mousetail, Shepherd's Needle, Scarlet and Blue Pimpernel, Corn Buttercup, Ground Pine,

Corn Marigold, Cowslip and Wild Pansy, the latter having to be picked on just the right day and before the cock pheasant got to them!

We were delighted by Mrs. Bull's more formal garden, the swallows flying around and Alec's Jacob's Sheep. The very enjoyable evening was rounded off indoors with a chat over coffee, tea and biscuits.

C. Neale

GETTING TOGETHER?

There are many societies of similar or overlapping aims in the county of Norfolk, although all remaining more or less isolated. Several years ago I suggested that we should take the initiative in linking these many bodies together, if only loosely, as a Norfolk Federation, or some similar body, which in unity might speak with some strength. I am thinking of other naturalists' societies like our own but serving regions, such as the Thetford Naturalists, the Heacham and West Norfolk Naturalists, the North Norfolk Naturalists (based at Aylsham), the Great Yarmouth Naturalists, the Norwich Wildlife Group. Or aimed at younger members, like the Norfolk Young Naturalists, Gt. Yarmouth Junior Naturalists, Norwich Watch Group. Or branches of national organisations like the British Naturalists' Society, Cromer Branch. Or conservation groups like Norfolk Naturalists' Trust which, especially through its regional groups -- Norwich, Broadland, North Norfolk, West Norfolk, Mid-Norfolk, South Norfolk, Breckland -- develop a natural history study and education side. Or specialist groups like the Norfolk Ornithologists' Association, the R.S.P.B. Norwich Gp, the R.S.P.B. Yarmouth Gp., the R.S.P.B. West Norfolk Gp., the Nar Valley Ornithological Society, the Young Ornithologists' Club: Norwich, the British Butterfly Conservation Society: Norfolk Branch, the Otter Trust, the Norfolk Forestry Club, the Buxton Tree Planters. And so many more besides, such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England: Norfolk Society, Friends of the Earth: Breydon, Friends of the Earth: Kings Lynn, Friends of the Earth: Norwich, Soil Association: Norfolk Gp., Geological Society of Norfolk, Norfolk Conservation Corps, Broads Society, and a wide range of local conservation societies with a natural history interest such as Blofield and District Conservation Group, Costessey Society, Reepham Society, Wymondham Society, to mention but a few.

The Committee of the time discussed the idea and decided (probably correctly) that an initiative from our Society might be seen as empire-building, if not actually a take-over bid; would be resisted; and that it would be better to run an increasing number of joint meetings to evolve a more organic unity. Perhaps I am too impatient, but we do not seem to have moved very far, and I am sure our initiative could be couched in terms which would not be seen as infringing anybody's sovereign rights. What do other members think, particularly those who also belong to one or more of these other organisations?

Geoffrey Watts

GOWER HOLIDAY

Members may like to hear of an area of the British Isles which would delight all natural historians - the Gower Peninsular in South Wales. I was there over the late spring bank holiday weekend and the following week. There is so much to see, all within twenty minutes drive of a centrally-situated farmhouse base: south-facing limestone sea-cliffs with their wild flower 'rock gardens' of this season; reed beds; sand dunes and slacks; woodland; rocky and sandy shores; moorland; farmland and easily climbed hills. Many of the best areas are protected as reserves -- National Nature, National Trust and Glamorgan Trust for Nature Conservation. The highlights for me were finding a badger sett and seeing three badgers emerge in the gathering dusk; buzzards; ravens; newly emerged ferns and flowers. I could provide more information to any interested parties.

Charles Neale

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, 1985.