



# THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK

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## A FORETASTE OF SUMMER

April in the Aegean Islands offers the naturalist a blend of unfamiliar species together with familiar species behaving unfamiliarly. On the one hand there is no doubt that these are foreign parts: olive groves carpeted with bermuda buttercups; dry stony slopes covered with the dwarf scrub vegetation of the garrigue, bright with rock roses, asphodels, flowering sages and other herbs, and with lizards slipping away out of sight, and large butterflies and brilliantly coloured beetles; open patchy evergreen woods with wild peonies and cyclamen growing under strange pines.

On the other hand there are many northern european species behaving as if it was the northern european summer. The popular beaches, for instance, are set out with neat ranks of oiled bodies - primarily British, German and Scandinavian - engaged in a controlled grilling treatment. At the top of the beach you may find the sea rocket and the horned poppy already in full bloom, and the sea holly and the prickly saltwort are far advanced. In the fields behind the beach poppies and charlock riot, and grassy banks bear mallow and bindweed and many familiar flowering grasses. House martins are busy with their nesting, and a faraway cuckoo sings for most of the day.

However, the rains have largely ceased, and the burst of colour will be short-lived. The annuals will soon seed and die down, and the leaves of the perennials will become grey and shrivelled. Here the summer will be harsh and burning, while the flowering of summer will move steadily northwards. It should be with us here any time at all. Kalo kalokairi! (Have a good summer!).

G. D. W.

## A NORFOLK CROCODILE! (Joint meeting with R.S.P.B. - Norwich Members' Group)

Sunday, December 9th, saw 40-50 people assemble at Potter Heigham church for a pleasant, roughly circular walk through farmland, rough grazing, reed bed and woodland habitats. The day was mostly dry and sunny. Birds were scarce to begin with, but spottings improved later on with good views of a stonechat using a barbed wire fence and post as a lookout for food; a herd of at least 20 mute swans; numerous cormorants and wildfowl; and to round off the walk, views of bittern and marsh harrier in flight.

We were told by a butterfly expert that the oak trees are good places to spot purple hairstreak butterflies in their season, and several different species of fungi were seen in the woodland. The members with me towards the walk's end all admired a new bridge over a dyke with its Broads Authority dragonfly logo branded into each end of the hand-rail.

C. Neale

### COVEHITHE & WALBERSWICK

On Sunday, February 3rd, 21 Society members met at Covehithe church for a walk to Benacre Broad and the pits near Kessingland levels to see what birds were about following the new year's first freeze-up. The walk started in sunshine but it soon turned cloudy with a little rain although not enough to curtail the birding. As we walked north along the cliff-top we were amazed at the speed of erosion that had taken place. When I first visited Covehithe there was still the bungalow on the cliff-top with its seaward garden and beyond that concrete slabs from wartime emplacements. Now the bungalow has gone down to the beach along with all its landward garden. The fine stand of oak trees that I first knew by the Broad have mostly been cut down, killed by salt water during the gales of the late 1970's.

We could see, albeit quite distant, several species of wildfowl on the Broad - mallard, wigeon, shoveler, pochard, mergansers diving, goldeneye and Canada geese. Two female marsh harriers were seen against the background of distant trees.

The walk further north to the old gravel pits was rewarded by very close views between dives for food of female goldeneye, female scaup, and for some the best bird of the day, a black-throated diver. They all seemed quite oblivious of our presence, silhouetted as we must have been for them against the grey sky. Oystercatchers, ringed plover and redshank were seen on the seaward ridge of shingle.

After lunch a smaller number of us assembled at Hoist Covert car park in the Walberswick National Nature Reserve, an area of saltings, rough grazing, extensive reed bed, woodland and heathland. On the way down to the reed bed we were thrilled by the antics of a 12-strong party of long-tailed tits. The walk along the rather muddy bank between the reed bed sections added six mute swan cygnets still in their off-white juvenile plumage, 'sailing' along a dyke, and excellent views of a hunting short-eared owl with its long wings and plumage of several shades of brown and gold.

After a while on the beach to look for stones suitable for jewellery, even fewer of us went to Westwood Lodge to see both male and 'ringtail' hen-harriers hunt over the reeds in the gathering gloom before they settled down to roost for the night.

. . . . . C. Neale. . .

### NORFOLK BEETLE RECORDS

If any members have records of beetles from Norfolk, I would be very interested to receive relevant details, e.g. locality, date, etc. This information will be used in the updating of the county list which is currently being undertaken, the preliminary results of which will hopefully appear in the Transactions during the next few years.

. Martin Collier, 67 Church Lane, Homersfield, Harleston, IP20 0EU . . . .

### COPIES OF PUBLICATIONS WANTED

1. Wanted - back copies (pre-1981) of the Transactions of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society, Transactions of the Suffolk Naturalists' Society, or any entomological journals.

(Martin Collier, 67 Church Lane, Homersfield, Harleston, IP20 0EU)

2. Do any members of the Society have spare copies of the 1960 and 1962 'Norfolk Bird and Mammal Reports' which they would be willing to part with. I have a continuous run from 1963 and recently obtained a 1961 copy. With the addition of the 1960 and 1962 reports I would have an unbroken run of 25 years which would virtually start with my own recordings of natural history in Norfolk.

(Francis Farrow, The Garth, 7 Common Lane, Sheringham, Norfolk, NR26 8PL)

3. Since the call is going out for Transactions, I may as well put in a bid for some very early parts - 1870-71 (Vol. 1, Part 2), 1874-75 (Vol. 2, Part 1), 1875-76 (Vol. 2, Part 2), 1877-78 (Vol. 2, Part 4) - to complete my run across 116 years. In 20 years of scouring second-hand bookshops, rootling through boxes of old books at auctions, searching sale lists, these have escaped me, but they just might be around tied up with string in somebody's attic.

(Geoffrey Watts, Barn Meadow, Frost's Lane, Gt. Moulton, Norwich, NR15 2HG)

SOME BYGONE NORFOLK NATURALISTS - 7

Rev. Richard Lubbock (1798 - 1876)

The study of natural history in our county has had many champions. Of those individuals who have carried on this great tradition must be mentioned the clergy, examples of whom have contributed to nearly all branches of the science. The Rev. Richard Lubbock was both typical of his class and also extraordinary in his contribution to this study.

Born in 1798, the eldest child of Dr. Richard Lubbock, physician of Norwich, he was sent to school in Chiswick and then on to Pembroke Hall in Cambridge where he gained his B.A. in 1824. The following year he received his M.A. and became ordained. Soon after ordination Lubbock obtained a curacy at Downham and then at Hellington, Rockland and Bramerton. A curate's life in the Norfolk countryside gave him much opportunity to pursue his boyhood interests in natural history. When a youngster he enjoyed nature study and shooting (pastimes which, in those days, often went hand in hand) and doubtless learned much from his uncle, J. Postle of Colney Hall, who had a noted collection of stuffed birds and other objects.

But he not only frequented Norfolk's wilder areas, for he spent holidays shooting and fishing in Wales, the Scottish highlands and on the continent, often in the company of the gifted Yarmouth naturalist and sportsman Charles Girdlestone (Girdlestone died lamentably young). As a result of these travels many friendships were formed - not just among the upper or middle classes, but among labouring folk, too - and these connections provided him with records and specimens for inspection. The names of John Kerrison of Ranworth, Rev. W. Kirby, John Henry Gurney, Dawson Turner, Henry Stevenson and William Yarrell are frequently linked with Lubbock's. Indeed, Yarrell was grateful for his assistance in the production of the classic 'British Fishes' (1836) and 'British Birds' (1837).

In 1831 Lubbock was elected a member of the committee of Norwich Museum and began lecturing to city audiences in 1835. Four years later he was appointed an honorary curator of vertebrate animals.

His career in the church took a decisive turn in 1837 when he became rector of Eccles, near Attleborough. Here he stayed for 39 years, until his death, and here he worked on the one book for which generations of naturalists have remained most grateful - 'The Fauna of Norfolk'. Published in 1845 it contained the basic stuff of his museum lectures. Lubbock describes the county's mammals, birds (with strong emphasis on the water birds), river fish, and has short notes on its reptiles and amphibians, sea fish, insects and plant life. In addition there are sections on decoys and hawking (the latter by Alfred Newton).

To the late twentieth century naturalist the content is riveting, for not only is Lubbock's treatment of the subject detailed, it is also prophetic. His warnings against the senseless persecution of species of hawks echo across the years and a note in the preface brings a chill .... "so much alteration may be looked for in a few years, that some species now remaining in our marshes will be speedily extinct."

Michael Bean.

FURTHER THOUGHTS ON HERONS AND FISH-PONDS

I was interested to read Geoff Watts' Editorial in the November 1984 'Norfolk Natterjack' on the theme of 'Hard Choices'. The crux of the article was that conservationists have to make difficult decisions when fighting to conserve a habitat or a species.

I would agree that this is sometimes the case. As it happens, it seems to me that most choices in this respect are reasonably straightforward be it in habitat management, (for example the control of invading scrub in a fen or on a chalk grassland), or in predator control, as in the need to trap mink where they threaten important ground-nesting birds. The hardest choices are in deciding where to apply the limited resources of conservation; should it be on land purchase, to safeguard a site forever, or on employing professional staff to win the hearts and minds of landowners over a far greater area?

My main reason for writing, however, was to make some observations on the example used, of the fish-breeder who decided to shoot a heron (illegally) to protect his fish, as he saw it. The problem of herons and fish-farms is one that the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has been aware of for many years. Our response was to employ a research biologist, Julie Meyer, to do a two-year study of the problem, in order to come up with some constructive solutions. The results of her work were published in 'Fish Farmer' in July, 1981, and a reprint of her article is available from this office. In summary, she discovered that, in most circumstances, herons could be fairly easily deterred by fixing two strands of twine all round the fish pond banks at 8" and 14" above the ground. With the twine at this height, the herons are reluctant to step over it or under it. The R.S.P.B. can now offer an advisory service to fish farmers who have problems with herons, to discuss this and other means towards ensuring that herons and fish farms can co-exist reasonably, if not exactly live together happily ever after. This service has been very much welcomed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who have been most reluctant in this region to issue the necessary licences to shoot herons on fish farms.

Committing some of the Society's scarce resources to this area of work was a hard choice. But the style of the approach - careful research, then publication of and publicity for the findings - seems to be the best way forward with many conservation dilemmas.

(Letter from Chris Durdin, Assistant Regional Officer, R.S.P.B., East Anglia Office, Aldwych House, Bethel Street, Norwich, NR2 1NR.)

(Letters from members about items in  
Natterjack or Society matters or  
natural history bits and pieces  
would be very welcome (particularly when  
there is a little space like this  
to be filled with something timeless  
or amusing or notable...)  
How about some brief notes  
or comments?)

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEXT NATTERJACK

should be sent to Ernest Daniels, 41 Brian Avenue, Norwich, Norfolk, NR1 2DP, to arrive not later than July 15th, 1985.