



THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

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TESTING THE GROUND

An ancient gardening friend of my youth, now perhaps hoeing some celestial row, was given to trying out new ways as well as new varieties. These innovations would be gleaned from fellow gardeners, or gardening columns in the press, or simply by browsing through the ranks of labels on the shelves of the local horticultural sundriesman (these were the days before 'garden centres'). I particularly remember these horticultural explorations because of his invariable practice of leaving some part of his crop untreated. Perhaps a new fertiliser treatment would be applied to only half of his carrots leaving the remainder untreated; or a new method of battling against insect pests would leave one row unsprayed; or a revised pattern of timing for his chrysanthemums would leave some plants under the old regime. I was never sure whether this sprang from an ingrained suspicion of novelties which would therefore be required to prove themselves by comparison with previous standard practice, or if it was simply a lively, interested and enquiring mind at work. Certainly by setting up side-by-side comparisons of treated and untreated material, he was operating a procedure at the heart of experimental science -- 'experimental' and 'control' batches of material, alike in every respect except for the particular treatment being investigated.

For some naturalists, knowing the names of things is enough, and making a list of the names of things in some set of circumstances is the extent of their ambition. Others are interested in what sorts of things are happening, collecting and recording anecdotal material about the aggressive behaviour of particular birds on the bird table, or the flowering date of the myrobalan tree at the bottom of the garden, or mammals squashed on roads, or lichens found on the south-westerly faces of sandstone walls, and so on. But this can only take you so far since the situations are so complex: different birds attending on different tables in different territories in different seasons: genetically diverse myrobalan trees in different sites on different soils in different seasons: and so on. Waiting for things to happen, particularly when they do not happen often, and when they happen in a complicated and variable way, is unlikely ever to unravel or tease out the factors at work. To be able to test the effect of some particular variable, we need to fix all the other variables, and that will usually mean setting up some sort of experiment involving experimental and control material. It need be little more involved than the experiments (for such they were) of my gardener friend, and yet the method is so powerful that even small results are far more compelling than a basketful of anecdotes gathered on a hundred afternoon strolls.

It is not every naturalist who has the curiosity to want to call upon the experimental method, but for many questions in nature there is no other way of finding answers. The experimentalist, amateur or professional, has much to contribute to the understanding of nature's ways.

G. D. W.

'BRITISH BIRDS' MAGAZINE

Members received with the August mailing a copy of a leaflet offering special terms of subscription for the monthly magazine, 'British Birds'. Articles cover such topics as identification, distribution and biology of European species of birds and is copiously illustrated, with an increasing use of excellent colour plates. Annual competitions encourage bird photographers and artists, the latter section covering the R.A. Richardson Award for young artists. The current special rate applicable to our members is £17.25 per annum for 12 issues plus annual index, all sent regularly by post.

D. A. D.

OFFERS OF TALKS

Members who feel that they have a worthwhile talk or talks which they would like the opportunity of offering to other societies are asked to get in touch with the Chairman of the Programme Committee before the end of the year. Please include the following information:

Name : Address : Telephone no. : Title(s) being offered : Whether projection equipment is needed or whether they have their own : Distance they are prepared to travel (the list will be circulated to all Norfolk societies, Suffolk Naturalists' Society and Cambridge Bird Club) : If they feel strongly about expenses, also include fee required if any (As a pointer when I visited Cambridge Bird Club about 18 months ago, I was offered £15 plus travelling expenses up to 50 miles).

It is intended to ask each Society circulated if they would respond with a list of their own, perhaps then leading to a widening of our own horizons.

Alec Bull

NOTICE OF SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING

At the last meeting of Council, on October 1st, the Treasurer reported on the financial condition of the Society, from which it was clear that an increase of subscriptions was due, if not overdue. If an increase was made the subject of a resolution at the A.G.M. in March, 1986, it would not begin to operate other than for new members, until 1987. In order for a change to act from next spring, therefore, Council decided to put the matter to a Special General Meeting in November, to be coupled with a scheduled lecture, the start of which would be delayed for a short time to allow an appropriate resolution to be considered.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that a Special General Meeting of this Society will be held in the Lecture Room of the Central Library, Bethel Street, Norwich, on Wednesday, November 27th, 1985, at 7.30 p.m. to consider, and if thought fit to adopt, the following resolution :

'That in accordance with paragraph 6 of the Laws of the Society, the following rates of subscription shall apply to all subscriptions becoming due on or after April 1st, 1986 :

<u>Membership Class</u>	<u>Annual Subscription</u>
Ordinary	£6.00
Junior	£3.00
Family	£7.50
Affiliation	£15.00

G. D. Watts, Chairman.

APOLOGIES

In the lists of Members of the Society Standing Committees given on p. 5 of the last issue of 'Norfolk Natterjack', the name of Mr. R. Robinson was inadvertently omitted from the Programme Committee.

SOME BYGONE NORFOLK NATURALISTS - 9

Arthur Henry Patterson (John Knowlitt) (1857-1935)

Born in a typical Yarmouth row, of humble parents, Arthur Patterson triumphed against adversity to become one of the finest of Norfolk's proud heritage of naturalists. From his earliest days he took an interest in wild things, accompanying his father to his allotment from where he glimpsed, for the first time, Breydon Water. Later, he visited the estuary with his lifelong friend, Ben Dye, and thus started his association with this stretch of water.

Early influences included the schoolmaster, William Wallis, (who he assisted as a pupil teacher) and Benjamin Harwood, the Yarmouth shoemaker and wild-fowler. Patterson himself took up shooting when he was about 20 and did not give up the 'sport' until nearly 40. Employment was a constant problem in those years, and from an assurance agent, in about 1877, he passed through the varied professions of postman, pedlar, showman (his specimens included a whale and an armadillo), warehouseman, zoo keeper (in Preston and Dublin) till finally (1895) he became a full-time school attendance officer. This post gave him the settled regime he needed to pursue fully his naturalist ambitions. All the time, though, he had been writing profusely: to newspapers, the Zoologist, and for publication. 'Seaside Scribblings', the first book of many, was published in 1887.

His main interests were birds and marine life, especially fishes. In 1901 he published the 'Catalogue of the Birds of Gt. Yarmouth' which was expanded in 'Nature in Eastern Norfolk' (1905). The section on fishes in the latter included many important county records discovered by Patterson while patrolling the wharves and beaches of his home town. Other books and articles dealt with the wildlife of Breydon Water and the activities of that unique breed of watermen who eked a living from the estuary: they were immortalised in 'Wildfowlers and Poachers' (1929). 'Wildlife on a Norfolk Estuary' (1907) is held by many to be his finest work. All of his writings, though, are imbued with a style which is idiomatic if, at times, roughly hewn. Here is Norfolk's Hugh Miller.

Respected beyond the bounds of his native county, he was elected an Associate of the Linnean Society in 1935. Yet he was ever ready to help his fellow East Anglians, like the artists Charles Harmony Harrison (when the family was on hard times) and Frank Southgate, who benefitted at the beginning of his short career from Patterson's patronage (several of his books are illustrated by the young artist).

There must be few lives as full as Patterson's. So many of his achievements are not mentioned here but the legacy we certainly do have in his books and other writings. And his influence is still strongly felt, especially by those fortunate enough to have known the man personally.

Michael Bean

AN INTERESTING DIATOM FROM THOMPSON COMMON

During the winter I examined some samples of diatoms from the pools at the north end of Thompson Common. In the mud I was excited to find a specimen of Surirella craticula, which I had never seen before. This is a striking diatom which appears at first glance to have the typical ribbed valve of a Surirella. The ribs are very tough and heavily silicified. This obscures the fact that they are actually beneath the valve surface. With care the details of the normal valve can be seen.

This species appears in the classic works on diatoms in the last century. It was first described by Professor Ehrenberg who regarded it as a Surirella but it was given its own genus by subsequent writers. Greville referred to it as Stictodesmis, and as Stictodesmis craticula it appears in Fred Kitton's list of Norfolk Diatoms of 1889 from "Whissonsett, Ormesby, Costessey." (1). Pfitzer, in his work on diatom structure, finally pointed out that it was a monstrosity of the common diatom Navicula cuspidata Kg.

Liebisch has stated that the presence of internal structure like this are the result of dilution or concentration of the water combined with unfavourable nutritive conditions. (2) This 'craticular' form of the diatom has been reported from a ditch alongside the river Cam at Coe Fen by Belcher and Swale (3) and I have found it at Benacre Broad. In both these localities there is a strange salinity situation. The Coe Fen ditch receives water from the Cam when it is high but often dries down and becomes somewhat saline. At Benacre Broad the sample was collected on the Broad side of the shingle sea bank which is occasionally overtopped or permeated by sea water at high tides. It is possible that the pool on Thompson Common also dries during a normal summer. Unfortunately the summer of 1985 has not allowed me to confirm that this is so.

- (1) KITTON, F. (1884) Fauna and Flora of Norfolk XIX Diatomaceae
Trans. N. & N. Nat. Soc. IIIV 754-770
- (2) LIEBISCH, W. (1928) Pektinmembran der Diatomeen etc.
Zeitschr. Bot. 20. 225-271
- (3) BELCHER, J.H. and SWALE, E.M.F. (1981) Records of Simonsenia delognei and some interesting specimens of Navicula. Microscopy 34 201-206.

K. Clarke

NOTES FROM THE COUNCIL MEETING of October 1st, 1985

Review of Subscriptions - As mentioned on p. 2, the Council discussed the Society's finances and decided to recommend to a Special General Meeting in November an increase in the subscription for the various classes of Society membership.

Honorary Members and Vice-Presidents - The working party set up at the July meeting produced its recommendations to clarify the distinctions between these positions. These suggested that Honorary Membership may be awarded to persons who have rendered notable contributions to the study of natural history in Norfolk, whether or not they are members of the Society at nomination. The suggestion in relation to Vice-Presidents is that they should normally be long-standing members of the Society, who have enjoyed extended periods of office on the Society Council or Committee, and who have made major contributions to the study of natural history. The Council accepted these recommendations in principle, but will consider details at its December meeting before laying recommendations before the A.G.M. next March.

Roadside Verge Nature Reserves - The Chairman reported that at a meeting with the Deputy County Surveyor and representatives of the County Planning Department on August 13th, the County authorities agreed in principle to work towards setting up 50 roadside verge nature reserves at sites recommended by the Society.

List of Speakers - Council accepted a suggestion from the Chairman of the Programme Committee that a list of members willing to give talks to other societies be drawn up and circulated to other East Anglian societies (see p. 2).

Society Library - The Society holds a library of about 100 volumes, kept in the Natural History Department of the Castle Museum. They have come to the Society largely through bequests, and are mostly books of antiquarian significance, valued in total between £5,000 and £10,000. The Council spent some time considering a proposition that since these valuable works were of little relevance to modern natural history, and since they are readily available in other collections in the region for serious researchers, the library should be sold. After some discussion Council decided against the sale of the library.

Projector Fund - The Treasurer reported that £230 had so far been raised for the purchase of a Society projector (for some time the Society has used projectors borrowed either from Keswick Hall College or U.E.A.) and he proposed to add a further £200 from Society funds so that a purchase could be made shortly. Council agreed to this suggestion.

G. D. W.

THE SOCIETY'S SPECIALIST GROUPS

For some years now our Programme Card has carried the names of Organisers of Specialist Groups that are concerned with, mainly, taxonomic groups. The Research Committee is currently reviewing the constitution and activities of such groups. A recent survey of Organisers has revealed that although there is considerable activity on behalf of the Society, few if any of the so-called groups actually function as a group with meetings. Most Organisers see their role primarily as 'recorder', co-ordinating and collating records, as well as disseminating information to interested members. It has even been suggested that members should send their records directly to the Castle Museum and that the current Organisers should become 'referees' or 'advisers' available to assist members with particular matters. Only one respondent expressed the wish to lead a revitalised group (for the algae); another is now resident in distant parts, and two others were at a loss to explain their continuing presence on the card!

The consensus of opinion was that the Society is too small to support actual groups: furthermore that they would be divisive, and even discouraging for beginners. But this is the product of canvassing a small number of experts, whereas the Council is anxious also to be responsive to the needs and wishes of the membership at large. Do you have an opinion? Members with views on these matters, or proposals (preferably supported with offers of practical help and expertise) that they would like the Research Committee to consider are invited to write to the Chairman.....

Dr. A. J. Davy, Cherry Cottages, Wheel Road, Alington, NORWICH, NR14 6NH

REMINDER

As mentioned in the August 'Norfolk Natterjack', an excursion extra to those on the Programme Card has been planned for Sunday, February 23rd, 1986, at Blickling. Meet in the Fisherman's Car Park, TG.179296, at 10.00 hours for a walk round Blickling Lake. Joint meeting with Norwich R.S.P.B. Group. Leader, Charles Neale.

A. L. B.

VERGE WARDEN REPORTS

Would those score or more of members who volunteered to keep an eye on particular verges across the county during this season, but have not yet sent me a note of their findings, please let me know by the end of November if possible? Some of you are involved with verges which are among our recommended 50 (see p. 4) and we need these results in planning our next moves.

Geoffrey Watts

RAFFLE PRIZES FOR THE ONE-DAY CONFERENCE

The Programme Committee are purchasing one major prize -- 'The MacMillan Guide to Britain's Nature Reserves' costing £30 -- for raffle at our One-Day Conference on Saturday, March 15th, 1986 (see separate leaflet), but would be very grateful if any members would care to donate any lesser prizes for raffle.

Alec Bull

THE BIRD WALKER - Bird Song Cassettes

We have recently received for review a set of three cassettes of bird calls published in Britain by Dominic Couzens, 34 Richmond Park Road, London, SW14 8JU, on behalf of a French organisation 'L'oiseau musicien'. This is a centre for the study of bird song under the direction of Jean C. Roche, who prepared the original recordings from material supplied by a number of other recordists.

Its secondary title, 'A Dictionary of Bird Sounds from Britain, Europe and North Africa', gives a clue to the coverage provided by the

three standard cassettes. It is, in effect, a guide to the calls or songs of the majority of breeding birds and regular visitors to the British Isles, Continental Europe west to U.S.S.R., and Western North Africa. 400 species are included, the majority with excerpts of both song and calls. Each species is introduced by its English name and the accompanying booklet gives a brief description of the nature of the item. It also acts as an index. The length of coverage varies from approximately 15 seconds to 45 seconds for species with a varied vocabulary of calls. The first cassette covers 'large' birds of the northern section of the region and the second the 'small' birds of this area. These two cover all the British breeding birds, but a number of occasional visitors appear in the third cassette which covers the 'South' -- large birds on one side, small on the other. As might be expected from the use of the word 'dictionary' in the title, entries in each section are listed in alphabetical order of their English names. Whilst the logic of this system as explained in the booklet is understood, I suspect the majority of serious users of this excellent sound guide will be familiar with the widely accepted order of families and species used in the majority of modern bird books.

The quality of recordings and reproduction is very satisfactory and the coverage for any one species generally sufficient. Once or twice I would have liked to have heard a call not present - calls (as distinct from the song) of the Parrot Crossbill, for example, in view of their occurrence at Wells, to compare it with those of the more familiar Common Crossbill. Comparison of similar species is not easy in view of the use of the alphabetical sequence. The Firecrest and Goldcrest are not far away from each other, but to compare, say, Blackcap and Garden Warbler does mean quite a bit of juggling with the knobs of the cassette player, by which time one may have forgotten the original call. The literature says the intention of the set is to enable the bird watcher to take the tapes with him in the field for use on the personal stereo systems now freely available. I suspect this method will not prove to be widely used; we are already heavily laden with various optical aids and cameras, etc. However, I am sure that many a serious bird watcher will have them handy to play on the car stereo.

To summarise, minor quibbles apart, I find this set a very useful addition to the recorded material available to the ornithologist. Unless he can afford to pay at least five times more for the detailed sets of records or cassettes available, this neatly packaged publication should find a place on the bookshelf of every serious bird watcher alongside his European Field Guides to which it is such a useful supplement. Copies of the set of cassettes, which give a total playing time of 3 hours 15 minutes, are available from Dominic Couzens at the address given above, price £15 plus £1 postage and packing. Cheques should be made payable to 'D.Couzens'

D. A. D.

CRAYFISH

While our common crayfish is declining in numbers, possibly due to the spread of a fungal infection, an American species - the signal crayfish - has been imported into this country to be cultivated on crayfish farms and has been advertised for sale to landowners for stocking private waters. It is a larger, faster-growing and more aggressive species, as well as being resistant to the fungus disease, and seems likely to pose a threat to the native species. So far sightings in the wild have been few, but information is urgently needed about their distribution. Both species live in pure water (river, stream, canal, reservoir, quarry) under stones, in holes in banks, or in old tins or other containers on the stream bed. The easiest way to tell the adults of the two species apart is to check the colour of the underside of the claws which is red in signal crayfish and white in the native species. Records to the Castle Museum, please.

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 January 15th, 1986.