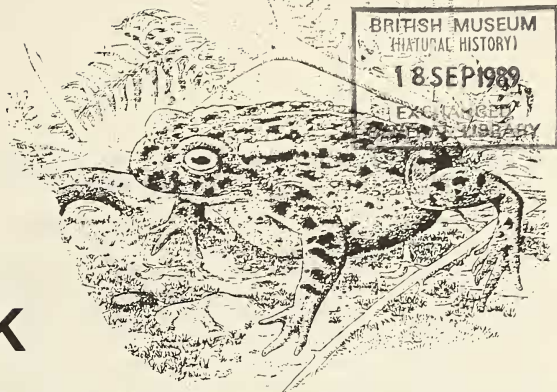


S.296A.



THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

No.22

August 1988

* * * * *

WHAT IS A NATURALIST?

To me this is a hard thing to define. It is not, as has sometimes been thought, one of those people who remove all their clothing and cavort on our beaches when the sun shines. Most Naturalists can easily be identified by the clothes they are wearing. The main uniform is usually Barbours and Wellies with certain badges of office around their necks - either binoculars or cameras - or both. Not forgetting the 'scope!

Each person has his own conception of a Naturalist. To some who have an Ornithological bias - it is being able to find a rare bird which has drifted off course, and decided to call in at one of the famous Reserves. Fortunately for such a rarity, an around the clock watch will be provided by the local warden and his assistants. This surveillance is particularly necessary during the breeding season when egg collectors are also hoping to get their tick on the thieves market.

To the Botanist, his greatest delight is the ability to identify a plant hitherto unknown, and be rewarded by being able to add another flower to the vast flora already discovered. It is sometimes necessary to protect these rare species from other persons, who in their ignorance want to pick this pretty flower and take it home to Aunt Mary, or worse still, dig it up and plant it in their garden.

There are Naturalists interested in fungi and their allied companions. Here again many are rare and therefore should not be removed. If they are, the hopes of them increasing another year may be lessened.

Yet another group of Naturalists are the Bugs, Butterflies and Bees brigade. Their knowledge ranges over an extremely wide area, from the common housefly to an obscure moth which may still be alive on a proposed bypass.

The Mammals of the Countryside are a great delight to the Naturalist. The beautiful little harvest mouse who quietly goes about his daily life, and can at times scare the unprepared, to the Otters and Badgers which precariously try to maintain their existence in an all too chemical world.

Some Naturalists find the larger flora more interesting and enjoy the beautiful trees and forests. The first buds and catkins make one aware of the stirrings of new life, and the bursting of their fresh green leaves announces the arrival of Spring. The beauty of their autumnal glory is heralded by the dramatic changes from gold through to deep russet red.

As a Naturalist one must not lose sight of the dark days of Winter. To some it is a time of repose, when all seems to be dead, but on a closer look there is beauty.

Go out on a frosty morning and look at the trees and see the magical stars and ice patterns which glisten in the wintry sun.

From these observations one can see there are many facets to being a Naturalist. Many are not specialists, but are described as "amateur", and take delight when the first swallow returns to his garden, when ones own blue tits finally leave the nest box. The Blackbird who normally is rather scared of humans during the year, suddenly realises that the gardener working, can be the provider of a juicy worm.

The Naturalist delights in seeing hedgerows of Cow Parsley and Red Campion, as well as the beautiful Bee Orchid, one of our rarer plants. The Butterfly busily flitting from plant to plant in the garden, mating and laying her eggs in order to reproduce itself before all too soon she will die. One must not forget the scavengers who so expertly keep the countryside clean.

To sum up 'What is a Naturalist'?

Happily the days are gone when it was necessary to capture or uproot specimens for identification. All that is needed now is a note book a camera and slide film at the ready to record a flower bird or bee.

The only qualification required of the Naturalist is to have an enquiring mind, general interest in his chosen speciality, a willingness to share his enthusiasm with his fellow beings, and to foster an interest in those people who, until now have not experienced the wonder of Nature.

And finally the Naturalist is the person who, in the poets words finds "Time to stand and stare".

Mary J Dorling.

NEW BUCKENHAM COMMON

25th May 1988

Eighteen members visited New Buckenham on a somewhat overcast evening to view the marvellous display of Green Winged Orchids *Orchis morio*. Those of us who were on the previous excursion several years ago were all agreed that there were far more plants than on that occasion. They now extend to almost every part of the common we visited, with a number of spikes close to the back road from the village towards Spooner Row. The number of colour variants was remarked upon by all, with flowers ranging from deep magenta through paler purples, to delicate salmon pink, with one or two spikes being pure white. There does not seem to be any particular reason for this, as the colour range varies within a single group covering an area of no more than a square yard. One or two large clumps of Bugle *Ajuga reptans* and Meadow Saxifrage *Saxifrage granulata* provided colour contrasts in blue and white with yellow added for good measure by the newly opened heads of Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris* Greater Yellow Cress *Rorippa amphibia* was just in flower by the Mere in which we found quantities of Curly Pondweed *Potamogeton crispus* and one of the grass leaved species, best told at fruiting time. The only bird life on the Mere was a duck with 13 well grown young and ascribed by one member to the species "Soup Duck" - certainly they were of very mixed parentage! Several pairs of Reed Bunting were met with, and at least two showed signs of anxiety near certain parts of the Common, where no doubt they had their nests. Before we left, several parties of up to twenty Starlings had dropped down into the thorn thickets for their night's roost, being family parties already out of their nests.

Sleeping Green Veined White and Orange Tip Butterflies were the only insects to come particularly to notice, other than water beetles etc in the Mere.

Alec Bull.

DEVIL'S PUNCHBOWL

22nd May 1988

About 35 members attended a most enjoyable meeting which had something for everyone, no matter what their interests. For those interested in birds, there was a pair of Little Grebes with chicks on the 'Bowl' itself, the waters of which were much deeper than they have been for many years, as are all the Breckland Meres at present. Here too were Coots and Moorhens, whilst in the surrounding bushes, three or four Garden Warblers were numbered amongst the songsters, but only one Blackcap. Further afield during our afternoon walk, a Tree Pipit was heard singing and seen doing its parachute like display flight.

Flowering plants were rather laggardly, though a number of species were seen which will be flowering in a week or twos time, including Kidney Vetch, Narrow Leaved Everlasting Pea, a local speciality, and Musk Mallow.

Members also commented on the apparent recent spread of Stinging Nettles through parts of the forest, and it was felt that this process is probably hastened in areas where the foresters have to disturb the surface after clear felling by bulldozing the stumps into rows. Back at the water's edge, where a wide fringe of bushes has been inundated, it was noticed that Elder in the flood have recently started to wilt, and doubtless other shrubs not used to having their feet in water will follow suit.

Herpetologists had much of interest round the waters edge, with the discovery by some young visitors of adult and young Grass Snakes, one of them bringing the adult to our Chairman and asking him if it was poisonous!. Regrettably, later general public visitors who also came across the adult, (rather a naive reptile apparently to stay around all day), were not so gentle with it from reports I received from other members. Here too were masses of tadpoles, though whether they were Frogpoles or Toadpoles was not determined.

A number of molluscs were encountered including a large Ramshorn Snail in the water, various Banded Snails and one or two specimens of a Hairy Snail. Yes, for the uninitiated, there are species which have hairy shells. There are several species, but only one is found in East Anglia, the Hairy Snail *Hygromia hispida*.

Following the mild winter, it seemed that trees were affected by every plague under the sun, with many and diverse caterpillars, and with galls sprouting out in all directions. Two different species were noticed by just casually glancing at some leaves of the Large Leaved Lime *Tilia platyphyllos* a specimen of which was found. A close study of the Oak trees present provided an almost bewildering array of gall species.

The morning walk brought us sightings of many Speckled Wood butterflies, but during the afternoon, a very good list was obtained, including Brimstone (One sharp eyed member also found the single egg of this butterfly on the leaf of a Buckthorn bush) Orange Tip, Small Copper and Green Hairstreak were also seen, the latter associated with the blaze of Golden Broom filling a clearing which had been replanted with Pine.

Before space runs out, I must mention that, eagle eyed as ever, Ernest Daniels brought me a floating Liverwort from the water's edge which looked very similar to the Gibbous Duckweed which was also present, and later rang me up to tell me that it was *Ricciocarpus natans* which was recorded here many years ago, when the water level was much lower.

Alec Bull.

DEAR EDITOR

Having read the Research Committee report through several times, I would like to point out that the whole point appears to have been missed as to the original purpose of the Roadside Verge Survey.

This was initiated in 1971 to collect information on verges of conservation importance in the County, as had been done in almost every other county in Britain. But nowhere better than by our immediate neighbours in Suffolk. There, they not only have the information on the important verges, they have them marked by posts, and they liaise not only with the Highway Authority, but also the Parish Council and the local farmer in every case. The result is some 120 protected verges, with others being marked as they are reported. Another point, a survey such as this does not 'end' at a given date, it should be on going for as long as there may still be a another worthwhile verge to find.

In about 1973, we did get as far as having a joint meeting at County Hall. The "we" being Dr.R.Hornby, then with the N.C.C. at Bracondale, Mr Peter Stevens, at that time Director of the Norfolk Naturalist's Trust and myself. As a start, six verges were to have been marked that following winter, and at least two were. Alas, the start was also the finish. Peter and Dick both moved away to other posts. The Nature Conservancy Council local officers pulled out saying that this was a job for the NNT and ourselves. The NNT sat on the information for several years, until questioned about what progress was being made. At this point, they returned all the information to me saying that they had not the time to do anything about it. Why? Didn't they like the fact that the idea and the donkey work of collecting material had been done by somebody else? So far as I know, all other roadside verge schemes are run by the County Trusts.

Looked at with hindsight, I would suggest that a scheme such as this ought not to be made a millstone round the neck of the Research Committee, whose duties are quite rightly organizing surveys such as those projected for How Hill and Wiveton Downs. If we have got to have the responsibility for protecting the county's roadside verges, then a Conservation sub committee should be set up to deal with that, and nothing else.

Alec Bull.

The Research Committee Report. I asked Paul Banham if he would write a contribution for the last Matterjack to fill in the remaining space. I told Paul just how much space I had to the line. I think Paul did an excellent job considering the handicap I had given him. also considering he was dropped in at the deep end when he took over the Research Committee. (Colin Dack editor.)

TO EDITOR MATTERJACK

I am seeking assistance from divers and marine biologists on the sub-littoral Flora and Fauna in the zone adjacent to the Heritage Coast (Holme - Kelling). I have been in contact with Dr.R. Hamond and two branches of local sub-aqua club, as well as the Nature Conservancy Council. Can NNNs members assist with species information?

Alan Scowen.

LONGHORN BEETLE

Whilst hunting for insects at West Harling on 23th June 1988, I came across a distinctive Longhorn Beetle on Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*. The body was about 15mm in length and the antennae slightly longer. The elytra were mottled black and yellow. The thorax and head were black with thick longitudinal lines of yellow pubescence along the middle and sides. It had grey antennae with black bands and the legs were also grey. I identified the beetle as *Agapanthia villosoviridescens* De.G. which is characteristically associated with Hogweed.

Joy (1932) in 'A Practical Handbook of British Beetles' says that this species occurs in south England northwards up to Lincolnshire, but is very rare.

I would be interested to hear from anyone who has information concerning the past and present status of this beetle in the county. (Paul G. Cardy, Wheels, Dodd's Road, Attleborough, Norfolk. NR17 2HH).

ANT ASSOCIATION WITH COMMON VETCH

For a number of years I have watched with interest the actions of certain ants when visiting the Common Vetch *Vicia sativa*.

The Vetches in common with a number of other plants such as *Impatiens* spp. Cherry, Guelder-rose, Passion flower and some of the Ferns have special glands called extrafloral nectaries. These glands at times secrete nectar when the sugar concentration in the phloem tubes reaches a height so as to prevent the amino acids and hormones from doing their work within the plant.

Many plants have these glands on their stalks, but in the Vetch they are situated on the stipules the outgrowths at the base of the flower on the stalk (petiole), and show up as dark spots.

At times ants can be seen queueing at these spots. I have seen five or six at one nectary. Two species of ants regularly visit the sites that I watch but their actions when disturbed are quite different. When I interrupt them with a small paint brush the Black Lawn Ants *Lasius Niger* immediately retire, but the Common Red Ants *Myrmica rubra* being much more aggressive turn to attack as if protecting their nectar source.

I am grateful to Ken Durrant and Reg Evans for all their help and encouragement.

Colin Dack.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

This is to remind members that their subscription were due on the 1st April. Cheques should be made payable to :- **Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society.**

Annual Subscription Rates are: Junior £3.00 Ordinary £6.00
Family £7.50 Affiliation £15.00

D.A. Dorling, Honorary Treasurer. "St Edmundsbury", 6 New Road, Hethersett, Norwich. NR9 3HH.

WARNING, If your Subscription has lapsed for more than one year and the Hon Treasurer has not received your subscription by the 1st August 1988. Your name will be deleted from the membership roll. (Colin Dack Membership Secretary).

HONORARY OFFICERS

It has come to my notice that some members are under the impression that the officers of the Society receive financial benefit from the Society's funds.

I can assure all readers that the Officers of the Society are strictly Honorary and none receives any form of gratuity or honorarium in respect of his office. They are all entitled to the reimbursement of postal and other expenses incurred on the Society's behalf, but one of my problems, as Honorary Treasurer, is to persuade them to submit regular claims.

I hope this assurance will put to rest any lingering doubts anyone may have concerning the proper use of the Society's funds.

D A Dorling Honorary Treasurer.

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORISE

Ordinary membership is for one person only. Family membership is for husband and wife and children up to 18 years old. Junior membership is for children up to 16 years old. Affiliation is for other Societies and Clubs.

MEMBERSHIP CARDS

The Society does not have membership cards. I believe the members making the requests could be getting the Society confused with the Trust. The Trust does have membership card. (Colin Dack, Membership Secretary.)

ALL YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT THE CRAG BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK

An introduction to the crag by Philip Cambridge, this an adhoc meeting for up to ten members to be held September 4th or 11th. If you are interested phone Philip on Norwich 54788.

BRITISH BIRDS MAGAZINE

Enclosed with this issue of Natterjack is a leaflet offering a special rate of subscription to members of the society who subscribe to the monthly magazine "British Birds"

This much respected periodical frequently contains articles of particular interest to anyone with a serious interest in Norfolk Birds, for example, The breeding of the Gadwell was dealt with in the February issue. A recent development has been the frequent use of colour plates.

PETROL / OIL GIFT VOUCHERS

Would members who are saving these to exchange for gifts, for the Society Social Evening raffle prizes, please give them to myself or Rex Hancy at any of the Society lectures before the beginning of November. Thank you, Colin Dack.

A 1st FOR NATTERJACK

I have now purchased an Acorn Archimedes 310 computer with "1st Word Plus" word processor software. You may have noticed some small changes in this Natterjack. I can now put *Italic* in mid line using a daisywheel printer. This has been my ambition ever since I took over the editorship of the Natterjack. With 1st Word Plus I can have spelling checker running as I type the material in, if I type in a misspelled word or a word that is not in its dictionary the computer makes a bleep noise, (it sounds like an Italian driving a car round Rome). When this happens I can call up the spelling menu to use the browse option where it displays 10 words nearest to what I have typed, I can then go forward or backward through the dictionary or use the guess option. I then mark the word and use the replace option. I find this very good as I am dyslexic (word blind). I do not think this will spoil the sport of looking to find my mistakes, some members have told me it would take some of the fun out of reading their Natterjack, if they could not find a mistake or two.

I believe that one day all the Society's publications will be mastered on a computer in very much the same way as I now do with the Natterjack. As in time 99% of all publications will be mastered on computer. This will bring the availability of getting your work published to almost everyone.

There is a quotation (The pen is mightier than the sword) I cannot find out who it's by, Here is one of mine (The Word Processor is more powerful than the bulldozer) I would like this to become true, I think all naturalists would.

I now have to save-up to purchase data base software so I can put the membership roll on the Acorn Archimedes.

I would welcome any suggestions as to how you think I can improve the Natterjack.

Colin Dack.

CONTRIBUTIONS For the Next Natterjack. I must have all contributions for the next Natterjack well before the 1st October 1988, so that the information about the Society's Social Evening can be with you in good time. Contributions to Colin Dack, 12, Shipdham Road, Toftwood, Dereham, Norfolk. NR19 1JJ.