

THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK



The Quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

No.27

November 1989

* * * * *

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held on Wednesday 14th March 1990 at 7.30 p.m. in the City Library Lecture Theatre. It will be followed by Dr. Sutherland's talk on Oystercatchers.

BERNEY MARSHES

Saturday 6th May 1989

This was the only Saturday meeting in the 1988-89 Programme. We met at Brundall Railway Station. There was an air of excitement amongst the members very much like when, as children, we went on a Sunday School outing. Many members enjoyed the train ride as most had not been on a train for a very long time over 20 years in my own case. When we arrived at the Berney Arms halt the platform was filled by the members. We were met by the Dave Weaver, assistant R.S.P.B. warden, as Les Street was on holiday.

We were taken round the Berney Marshes reserve, where at one point we were able stand up on a bench to see Coot, Shelduck and Great Crested Grebe which were displaying but not carrying weed. The water in a ditch was red, covered with Water Fern *Azolla filiculoides*. A Green-veined White butterfly was seen on Hoary Cress.

While we were having lunch a Kestrel was a far way off. It was not until it hovered that we were sure it was a Kestrel. It was so peaceful and quiet, all you could hear was the sound of the wind rustling the grass, bird song and water lapping on the bank.

After lunch we set out for Great Yarmouth by the side of Breydon Water. During the walk we saw Yellow Wagtails, Skylark and found the nest. Dunlin in summer plumage, bright rusty back and black belly, were feeding in the mud. Redshank, Ringed Plover, Oystercatcher, Turnstone and Redshank were also present.

By the time I had reached the bridge over the Fleet I was in a lot of pain

from the Cartilages in my knees. At this point I then went through the pain barrier. After that the pain went and I was then able to enjoy the rest of the walk to Great Yarmouth.

The walk from Berney Arms to Great Yarmouth seemed a long way as it is so flat. But to make up for this there are the big skies, peace and quiet. This is a walk to be recommended for its peace and quiet.

As the tail end of the party came to where the rail lines are nearest to Breydon Water a train left Yarmouth Station with a good number of the party on board. They waved like mad at us we waved back. I wonder just what the other passengers thought of this. We, the tailenders, arrived at Yarmouth Station about five P.M. We then got the train to Brundall to collect our cars. That night I had the best nights sleep I have had for weeks before or after.

Colin Dack.

EXCURSION TO BERNEY MARSHES

6th May 1989

Twenty six members gathered at Brundall railway station on this sunny spring morning for the short trip to the Berney Marshes Reserve.

We were met at the station by Dave Weaver, the assistant R.S.P.B. warden at the reserve this year, who briefly outlined the extent and nature of the reserve. The R.S.B.P. also have management control of the adjoining Breydon Water.

The water levels of the man made pools and scrapes were low and therefore relatively quiet of bird life although a small group of Black-tailed Godwit were present and Dunlin displayed their Summer plumage.

After lunch the group made its way along the banks of Breydon Water towards Great Yarmouth. White splashes of Scurvy Grass were dotted along the water's edge and a Drinker Moth *Philudoria potatoaria* caterpillar was noted. Spring had definitely arrived as Swift, Swallow and Common Tern swooped and dived over a small pool.

Near Yarmouth the tide had thrown up a deep beach of shells in a small inlet built up of millions of hydrobia shells and the pink and yellows of the tellin shells the remains of the waders food larder in the mudflats. The stragglers of the group finally caught the 5.20 train back to Brundall after an enjoyable day.

Linda & Colin Corkerton.

BRITISH BIRDS MAGAZINE

Enclosed with this issue of Natterjack is the usual annual leaflet inviting subscription to the monthly magazine "British Birds".

Members of this Society are eligible for the concessionary rate of subscription.

The magazine, now frequently illustrated in colour, contains a wide variety of articles on the birds of Britain and Western Europe. A recent paper of particular interest to Norfolk dealt with the influx of Curlew Sandpipers in the Autumn of 1988.

HEGGATT HALL

Sunday 16th July 1989

Two major excursions had been made to Heggatt Hall, Horstead in the past, the very first one undertaken by the Society in 1869 and the centenary celebration outing in 1969. We were welcomed on this occasion by Mr. Richard Gurney who showed us copies of those previous meetings together with photographs.

We then made our way via the fields to the Doctor's plantation where we were welcomed by numerous biting mosquitoes *Aedes annulipes*. After taking a fleeting view of the now overgrown steep sided cut where the barges took the chalk down to the river Bure we arrived at the pump house. Water is pumped from here to irrigate the many surrounding fields. A number of Deadly Nightshade *Atropa belladonna* were in flower nearby.

Much interest was taken in the flora of the borders of the fields as we proceeded along, Venus Looking Glass *Legousia hybrida* being quite common. A fine Dryad's Saddle fungus *Polyporus squamosus* was found on an old tree trunk as we approached the marshes, where we had planned to have our lunch. To our surprise our host had left an ice box full of refreshing drinks to the delight of all present.

After lunch we made our way through the woods and along the lanes bordered by high hedges of Lilac etc. to inspect an overgrown garden of an uninhabited house in Heggatt street before returning to the Hall, having had a marvellous day in an area which can only be described as "The back of beyond". 150 plants, 23 fungi, 22 galls and 50 insects were noted during the day, the lists have been forwarded to Mr. Richard Gurney with our sincere thanks.

Ken Durrant.

BEESTON REGIS COMMON

9th September 1989

On a very windy day some thirty hardy members took the opportunity to visit this fine site. Being Autumn meant that the spring flowers were now seeded after an exceptionally hot summer, but there were still some rewards to discover.

Great patches of Dodder *Cuscuta epithymum* were seen on the Gorse. Arrow-head *Sagittaria sagittifolia* and Flowering Rush *Butomus umbellatus* were still in bloom in the pond. The Grass of Parnassus *Parnassia palustris* and Devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* had just started to bloom, forerunners of the masses to come on this site.

Despite the very dry season the two Sundews *Drosera anglica* and *D. rotundifolia* were still present on the Sphagnum mounds. The party were shown the scarce Crested Buckler fern *Dyopteris cristata* and the Adder's Tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, the commonest fern being the Broad Buckler *D. austriaca*. Marsh Arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris* was very conspicuous on the top bog, as was our smallest rush Bristle Scirpus *Isolepis setacea* approximately 2" in height.

The Oaks have produced large numbers of Knopper galls on the acorns, caused by the wasp *Andricus quercuscalicis*. One Willow had its leaves decorated with the Red bean Galls caused by the sawfly *Pontia proxima*. Many of the rushes *Juncus effusus* and *J. conglomeratus* had their seed heads similarly decorated with the white larval cases of a micromoth *Coleophora caespitiella*.

Hops *Humulus lupulus* and Honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* festooned many of the bushes as we made our way back for lunch. A number of budding photographers were disappointed because no Adders had been seen. Apparently they were sheltering from the wind, although one or two Common Lizards were seen. Just before we reached our cars we found a patch of Wild Celery *Apium graveoleus*, quite different from its cultivated relative except in its smell.

After lunch a number of members took advantage of the many fine Blackberries to be found in the area, making it a very interesting outing.

Ken Durrant.

MARINE DIATOMS AT HORNING

Horning is about 20 miles from the sea along the River Bure. the river at that point is slightly tidal, the range is about 4 inches (100mm).. But we tend to think of the Bure broads as fresh-water lakes. This is not at all a good simplification. They are better regarded as the top of a tidal estuary discharging into the North Sea.

For instance, on 14th February the North sea came rushing up the rivers and made the water at Horning very salty. I sampled the River Waveney at Fritton that day and found the river water to contain 16,200 mg/l chlorides (ie 84% sea water).

Two days after the surge the water at Horning Church Bend still contained 4,400 mg/l chlorides (23% sea water).

From time to time the shells of marine diatoms are found in the Bure Broad and at Wheatfen on the Yare (Clarke 1960). It is generally thought that they come from the lower estuary by landward movement along the bed of the river.

However when I examined the water sample from Horning on 16th February 1989 I was astonished to find, two days after the surge, a large number of real marine species of diatoms. They were not the species common in the lower rivers, they were from the plankton of the North Sea itself. And they were not just the shells, they were alive and healthy. Obtaining good plankton samples from the sea is very difficult but Lowestoft Harbour, Lake Lothing, allows a plankton net to be drawn through water not as full of fine sand and clay as the sea off the coast. The assemblage of marine diatoms present in the Horning sample was very similar to that present in Lowestoft Harbour.

Among the diatoms found at Horning were *Rhizosolenia setigera*, *Thalassiosira baltica*, *Thalassiosira eccentrica*, *Thalassiosira gravida*, *Actinoptychus senarius*, *Odontella aurita*, *Biddulphia alternana*, *Rhaphoneis* sp., *Diploneis interrupta*, and the delicate *Skeletonema costatum*.

So the salt water at Horning had not just moved up from the lower estuary between Acle and Yarmouth where you find this level of salt in the water but had come direct from the North Sea. This is an important factor if we are to understand water movements in the Broads Area.

K. B. Clarke.

MEETING ON MICROSCOPY

A two day meeting on microscopy is being organised by the Quekett Microscopical Club at U.E.A. on 21 & 22 July 1990. A programme of lectures and demonstrations are being arranged, Speakers from U.E.A., N.N.N.S., and the Quekett have been invited to cover a wide range of topics that should interest not only microscopists but naturalists in general.

Subjects covered will include cell structure, diatoms, copepods, feathery moth flies, tardigrades and mounting techniques. Video recording of the microscope image and so on. A more detailed programme will be available shortly.

The meeting is open, would anyone interested please contact Dr. E.M. Thain, 36 Friars Quay, Norwich (Tel:- 625017) as it is necessary to know at an early stage the approximate numbers to book appropriate space at U.E.A.

ANOTHER SNAIL PARASITE

During the meeting at Grimes Graves a Banded Snail shell was brought to me. On examination it was found to have the puparium of a fly inside.

This fly emerged on 24th July 1988 and is another which parasitises snails. This species I had not previously seen in Norfolk *Discomyza incurva* (Ephyridae).

UNUSUAL HOSTS OF BROOMRAPE (OROBANCHE MINOR)

Common Broomrape is associated with hosts from the families compositae and leguminosae.

It has been noted previously on Foxglove and a further example of this was noted in Welborne - the second record only.

Last year a plant was seen in the garden clearly associated with Sweet Pea which is a first observation.

On 26th July 1988 a small 2" cutting of a Fuschia plant was treated with root hormone and placed in a proprietary compost in a 3' pot. No Orobanchae seed had been added but nevertheless some must have been present.

A small shoot of Common Broomrape was noted on 21st April 1989 arising from the Fuschia roots. It continued to grow and at 5" tall has produced flowers and seeds.

This is the first record of Orobanchae minor on this host. R. Evans.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEXT NATTERJACK should be sent to Colin Dack, 12, Shipdham Road, Toftwood, Dereham, Norfolk. NR19 1JJ, to arrive not later than **1st January 1990**. Contributions sent after this date will not be accepted for the February Natterjack.

WORKING AT WHEATFEN

"Could you write a piece about a typical day's work at Wheatfen?" was the casual question Phyllis Ellis asked and which has led to my writing this. I now realise that this is more easily said than done.

The Norfolk Conservation Corps, of which Ted was Patron for 8 1/2 years, began its work on The Ted Ellis Nature Reserve by clearing a footpath along one edge of the property. We have done no footpath work since this first day.

On our next visit we cleared scrub from an area of fen, scrub which was beginning to shade out the very interesting flora. We used axes, billhooks and bowsaws, and we felled a lot of scrub, but not enough for Phyllis. She went off to the house, and returned with an interesting and amusing contraption, a petrol-driven generator which was mounted on the chassis and wheels of a perambulator. This was then started up, and the power it generated was used to drive a chainsaw which was operated by Phyllis. This Wheatfen Chainsaw Massacre presented a fascinating picture, a picture which we had never seen before and which we have not seen since.

The professionals then moved onto the site, in the form of the Community Programme team, and we -- being experts-- then spent a day in burning a large amount of scrub which they had felled. WE have, however, not done this again.

We then moved on to management of the dykes, and have worked on this problem ever since, this now being our sole responsibility and there being very much work to be done. The work in question is the clearance of scrub which is hanging over the dykes, or growing in the dykes, making many sections very difficult, or even impossible to penetrate. This involves using boats: to get to the work-site, to cut the scrub which is growing in the dykes, and to transport the cut material to the bonfire. It also involves getting cold, wet and very muddy, which is probably why we enjoy it so much, why we have spent so many days doing it and why we will spend so many more days in doing it. For us, therefore, you might say that this is now a typical day's work at Wheatfen.

You might, in fact, say no such thing! On one visit we had to contend with the rising tide and to build a bonfire in six inches of water. On another a volunteer's foot went through the bottom of a very large and very ancient work-boat, so that all aboard had to quickly abandon ship and to bring it ashore before it sank. On the next visit we found that, in the meantime, some unobservant person had launched it again so we had to begin the day by raising it from the bed and, we were interested to see when the water ran out, also raising two eels. At Phyllis's request, to prevent this happening again, we began our next visit by breaking up this boat and using it to start our bonfire. Finally, on a day in March, with the tide running very fast in the dyke, a volunteer had his spectacles knocked off and they fell into the water, so that he had to quickly get undressed and get into the water to find them before the tide carried them away.

So, a typical day at Wheatfen? Well, it is always interesting, amusing and very worthwhile; it is always spent in very pleasant company; there is always much wildlife to be seen; there is always excellent hospitality at the end of the day, and there is always chocolate concrete; and it is always different from the last time.

Eddie Boosey.