

# THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK

The Quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

No.31

November 1990

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## BARROW COMMON, BRANCASTER

Recording Field meeting, 12 August 1990

Barrow Common occupies an area of glaciated sand and gravel just inland from Brancaster Staithe, around 150' above sea level (hence giving some fine views of the coast), falling away abruptly to Valley Farm to the east, and more gradually to woodland to the south. There are a few gravel-pits, abandoned and overgrown apart from one just to the east of the north/south bisecting road.

The common was grazed until the early 70's (G. Beckett), but is now dominated by Gorse and Bracken, with incipient scrub, including some healthy-looking young Oaks. Along the border with Gas Plantation to the south there is not surprisingly an intermediate sparsely timbered zone.

The Society's visit co-incided with one of the driest periods in recent years, so that many of the smaller plants especially were very dried up, if not dead. However, there had been no recent fires. Fortunately, the vascular plants and bryophytes had been surveyed within the last three years by other individuals and organisations, who have kindly made their records available. Invertebrate animals were well represented and there were some dozen species of birds seen or heard.

A total of 12 spider sp. were recorded by Rex Hancy, and 3 others by Reg and Lil Evans, who were principally concerned with Fungi. Although the dry conditions were hardly conducive to Mycology, they were delighted to find a top-quality specimen of *Volvariella bombycina*, a gill-fungus which they had not previously recorded in Norfolk, and which was growing in a crevice 8 feet up in an Ash tree!

I am at present collating all the data, which will later be available for any members interested.

Paul Banham, Chairman, Research Committee.



### OBITUARY: John Michael Last (1941-1990)

Few members of the Society could claim to know John for he was a very private person. For thirty years he had worked at Lowestoft Fisheries Department. He was never happier than at weekends spent at the family home: The Mill House, Corpusty. Here, working with his brother Roger, he created a most original garden. His special love was the play of water and a combination of streams, pools and fountains was a constant delight. The sound and movement of water is most appropriate for the garden of a water-mill.

A highly skilled and very knowledgeable gardener, John not only maintained the garden in an immaculate condition, but was constantly creating new features. Always original, his designs extended to classical temples adorned with frescoes, grottos, gothic ruins, bridges and terraces. The garden a plantsman's paradise - was featured in several publications including "The Englishman's Garden" and "English Country Gardens".

My wife and I made a point of visiting Corpusty Mill garden each spring. John was never too busy to escort us as we explored and returned to old favourites. He will be remembered by naturalists for his annual selection of mammal vignettes gracing the pages of the Norfolk Mammal Report. For over two decades he provided exquisite drawings. He also recorded the birds appearing in the vicinity of the Mill. It gave him great pleasure to confirm successful breeding of Grey Wagtails there earlier this year after a long period of absence. He showed us the nest within inches of the mill-race.

John was a very talented artist. His skills were revealed to a wider audience through publication of Jarrold's wildlife calendars and Christmas cards in aid of Norfolk Churches Trust. He also provided line drawings for Peter Tate's "East Anglia and Its Birds".

Following much persuasion John agreed to submit water colours for the Norfolk Naturalists Trust Christmas cards. Publication led to a wealth of private commissions. Special favourites included harvest mice and red squirrels. Exhibitions of John's paintings were mounted in the Assembly House, Norwich and at Picturecraft, Gallery Holt.

Michael J. Seago.

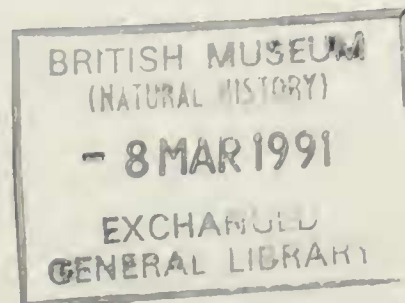
### F.W. FROHAWK : HIS LIFE AND WORK

Books these days have a short life (almost a sell-by date!) and after three years, warehouse room is needed for more recently published titles. The Crowood Press made *F.W. Frohawk: His Life and Work* out of print earlier this year and as author I have bought up the remainder stock.

Copies of this colourful, fully illustrated hardback book are now available at a much reduced price. The text includes a blend of biography, autobiography (from FWF's memoir), the natural history world around the turn of the century and Frohawk's varied work as artist and book illustrator, lepidopterist and field ornithologist. Signed copies can be obtained from Dr June Chatfield, Anglefield, 44, Ashdell Road, Alton, Hampshire. GU34 2TA at £7.50 inclusive of postage.

A review of this book can be found in Natterjack No.18 by Ken Durrant, with a second opinion by Colin Dack.





### HOUSEMARTINS SAGA

On Sunday 5th August 1990 Anne Brewster (Chairman), Ken Durrant (President), and myself Colin Dack (Membership Secretary), represented the Society at Hill Farm open day run by the National Trust at Itteringham. There we met the Reverend Keith Hawkes (Diocesan Rural Officer). He told us a saga of three baby Housemartins and I asked him if he would write it down for Natterjack here is his letter.

As requested, I am recalling the little saga of the three Housemartins chicks I found on the ground after their mud nest had come away from the Rectory eaves. I suppose because of the very dry and exceptionally hot weather? Or just a poor building job. Actually it had been part of a "double dweller" (semidetached), the other half still operational and housing the usual family now just about to fly.

What to do? I had not the faintest idea of how to rehouse these little chicks, all seemingly healthy but a long way from fully grown. Then I remembered the other nest some 10 to 12 feet along the eaves which I could tell from the recent lack of droppings was now vacant. I carefully shaped the tiny chicks tucking in their little wings and feet and by balancing through one of the bedroom windows "posted" them one at a time through the "letter box" opening of the vacant nest.

Then I waited. First of all "Mum" kept returning to the shattered remains of the fallen nest, still attached to the wall, looking around in a very bemused way. I was not hopeful and I felt that if the chicks were not fed quickly they would certainly not survive, however in the morning there were the usual tell tail signs on the door step below the nest that there was definitely something happening.

Well it's good news because all three chicks can now be seen peeping out of their new home and being fed at frequent intervals. It is a good feeling that the three will thrive and eventually fly away in due course, hopefully to return.

P.S. I have recently spoken to Keith on the telephone and he tells me that all three chicks fledged successfully. Also we met Keith on the Sunday and I received this contribution on the following Wednesday. If only the other contributors could be as quick!

### STOP PRESS:

The Society's latest occasional publication (*The Birds of Great Yarmouth* by Society member Peter Allard) will be published in November.

128 pages in length, it includes full details of all species appearing within a five-mile radius of Yarmouth town centre. illustrated in colour and black & white. An additional feature is a unique collection of R.A. Richardson vignettes.

A full review will appear in the Eastern Daily Press at the time of publication.

Michael J. Seago.

## THE PEPPERED MOTH

9th June 1990.

This evening in my garden, I discovered a single specimen of the Peppered Moth *Biston carbonaria* at rest on the rear wall of my house. This is a most interesting and a much studied species of moth and its range extends throughout Europe and Asia.

It was known to naturalists and entomologists during the eighteenth century in its normal form, those specimens being white with black speckling on the wings. They were found throughout most of Britain. However, during the 1840s, a black variety was found in Manchester and it was soon found that after a while, most of the specimens found and those collected in that area, were black. Throughout the northern industrial area, the black variety was replacing the former and this trend soon spread, so that 90% of all specimens found were black, the speckled form being found more in southern areas.

This phenomena became known as industrial melanism, a typical case where nature has made changes to suit the changing environment. Specimens of the normal colouring when resting on the trunks of trees that have become blackened by industrial fumes and smoke, have little or no natural camouflage against their predators, and being conspicuous, become easy prey for such as birds who normally catch their prey by sight. Specimens of the normal colouration when resting on lichen covered tree trunks, are indeed, difficult to spot. They therefore have adapted their genetics to suit their surrounding in order to protect themselves. Certain other moths and insects have also adapted to these changes.

When I have collected black specimens of the Peppered Moth, I have often tried to place them on a light coloured background, but those that have not flown off, have invariably crawled on to a dark coloured surface in order to rest.

Tony Brown.

## BIRD & MAMMAL REPORTS - OLD NUMBERS

Our stocks of Bird & Mammal Reports prior to 1971 are now exhausted. We occasionally receive requests for old back numbers from people wishing to complete runs. If any members plan to throw away any old issues when clearing out their bookshelves, the Society would be happy to receive them for stock. Copies in good condition are sold, thus aiding our funds.

D. A. Dorling (Honorary Treasurer).

## 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.

## GRASSHOPPERS AND ALLIED SPECIES

The survey of the county orthoptera is progressing well, but we still need all your records of grasshoppers, bush-cricket, groundhoppers and earwigs.

Data required are: species, 4 or 6 figure grid reference, locality, habitat, name of recorder.

Please submit all records by the end of November to: D. Richmond, 42, Richmond Rise, Reepham, Norfolk. NR10 4LS.

## HEGGATT HALL

Owing to the dry weather it is perhaps not surprising that few 'toadstools' were found.

Efforts were made to record other kinds of fungi with a total of 32 species.

A dozen galls were added to our list to which A Brewster and M Woolner made useful additions.

Reg & Lil Evans.

## LUMINOUS FUNGI

We have recently received a piece of wood from an old tree stump. This glowed in the dark producing a steady light, on examination fungal threads were to be found in the luminous area,

It has been suggested that most (if not all) of the luminous wood in Britain is due to the Honey fungus *Armillaria mellea*, and that cultures containing the young rhizomorphs exhibit this property.

Other mycologists have said that the luminosity has appeared in Butt Rot *Heterobasidion annosus*, the Sulphur Polypore *Laetiporus sulphureus* and *Xylaria polymorpha*. The spores of *Mycena rorida* have also been named.

We have not found this to be so in the specimens we have seen but we are still looking!

Reg & Lil Evans.

## POSTER

Will members please try to get the poster for the Society enclosed with this Natterjack (if received in time for this mailing) put on display. (Not in any of the Norfolk Library's as they will be being supplied direct).

**MEMBERSHIP CARDS** This year as in most years I have had a number of letters from members asking for membership cards. The Society does not have membership cards. Some members are getting the Society mixed with the Norfolk Naturalists' Trust. They do have membership card. Colin Dack. Membership Sec.

**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 1991**. Contributions sent after this date will not be accepted for the February Natterjack.



## THE ZEBRA MUSSEL IS STILL WITH US

In the War and in the immediate post war years the broads were overrun by *Dreissena polymorpha pallas*, the Zebra Mussel. This freshwater mussel had first been noticed in this country in 1824 when it was found in the London Docks, having been presumably imported from Eastern Europe. It is famous for mass development there. The way in which it overran Lake Balaton in Hungary is typical : up to 1933 10 specimens had been collected but by 1935 there were estimated 30,000  $m^{-2}$ .

The zebra mussel was first reported from the broads by A.J. Rudd who found it in Oulton Broad. It was soon to be found in the rest of the broads which had connections with the rivers and in the Ormesby group of broads. It had been imported into the Ormesby Broad down the pipeline from from the river Bure at Horning, parts of which were reduced from 24" dia to 9" dia by growths of the mussels on the inside.

But from the mid fifties onwards a decline in numbers was noticable. The Mussel is normally attached to piling about 1.5 to 2 m below the water surface or to the shells of *Anodonta cygnea*, the Swan Mussel. It leaves typical groups of threads on the Swan Mussel shell and this is the easiest way of detecting its presence. In the 1970s and 1980s I looked for it everywhere in broadland without success. The Zebra Mussel seemed to have died out.

Recently I met Dick Briggs who works alongside Oulton Broad. He told me that the musels were still there, and to prove it he telephoned me when they had just removed a piece of piling from the broad. He got a nice collection of mussels for me from about 5 ft below the surface.

The population appeared to be made up of only last year's mussels and this year's mussels. Only 3 dead mussel shells were found in the sample of over 200 mussels. These empty shells were all slightly smaller than the "second year mean" of 17.16 mm, (fig 1) the largest mussel seen was 26 mm long. There were very many young mussels still in the stage where they crawl around very actively. No velliger larvae were seen. The mussels were associated with freshwater sponges.

It would seem from these measurements that the piles, which were years old, had only been occupied by the present population from last summer. It is possible that the two warm summers of 1989 and 1990 have had something to do with the reappearance of *Dreissena* on this spot : their breeding is said to be temperature regulated with a threshold temperature of 16 degrees C.

It would be nice to hear from other observers who have found *Dreissena polymorpha* recently.

Keith Clarke.

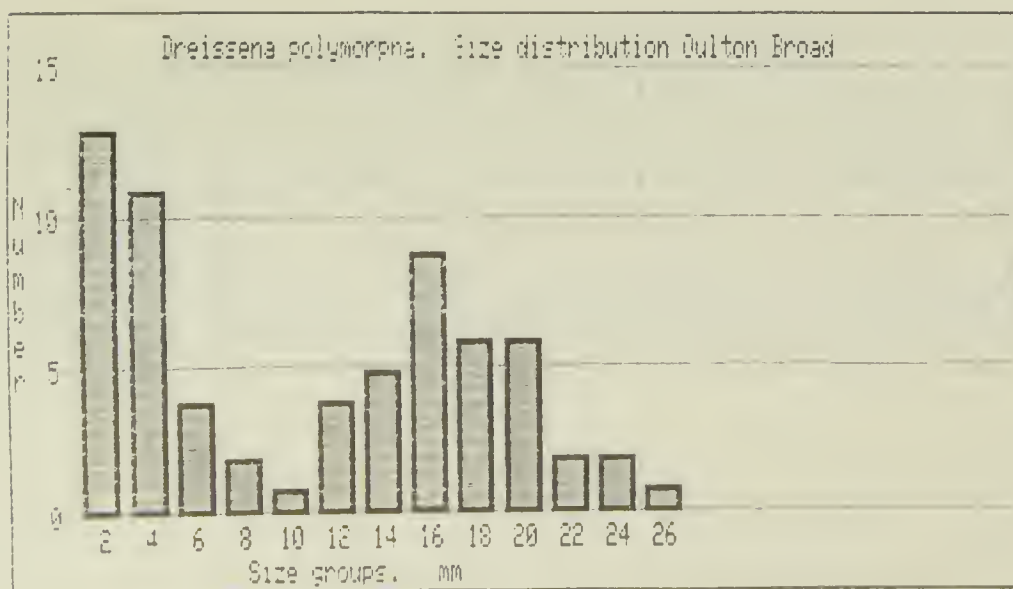


Figure 1. Length distribution of a group of 66 mussels taken from submerged piling at Oulton Broad.