Number 33

THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK

May 1991

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

CHANCE MEETING IN RHODES

This year I visited Rhodes in the second half of March to look at the flowers. The date may sound early to many people but this is the eastern end of the Mediterranean and flowering is a week or two in advance of places not much further west, such as Crete. For example, the pyramidal orchid, *Anacamptos pyramidalis,* was in full bloom, whereas in Crete, in my experience, it would not reach that stage until about the second week in April, while in Majorca flowering would not occur before the end of that month.

What can be said of Rhodes as a place to seek flowers ? Certainly in the vicinity of Rhodes town the effects of tourism are all too apparent. Nevertheless, a few miles to the south, and the island is over sixty miles in length, there is an appreciable amount of country worthy of exploration and, unlike many other places, organised parties were not in evidence. During my first week I never saw anyone who looked remotely interested in flowers. In the second week I made two contacts with enthusiasts.

The first encounter was near the summit of the mountain, Profitis Elias. It is tree-covered and as I approached the top I noted a parked car and, not far away, a couple who were obviously interested in the flowers. I walked across to meet them. Immediately they were keen to show me one of their finds -- *Procopiania cretica,* a plant not unlike comfrey but the free end of the corolla tube is split into fine lobes which are recurved. It grows in shade and is confined to some of the Greek islands. We talked and as soon as they heard I came from Norfolk the question came - 'Did you know Eric Swann' ? The world of the naturalist is very small. The couple came from Worthing but our mutual contact removed any barriers which might have existed. I asked them if they had found *Ophrys fuciflora* ? 'Not yet' was the reply but they said they had seen it four years previously - 2.6 Kilometres beyond the monastery, in the wood on the left hand side of the road going north from Soroni. I made the appropriate note. The next day I proceeded to the location, finding it without too much difficulty *O. fuciflora* was not in evidence but of the orchids *Orchis italica, Orchis papilionacea, Ophrys speculum, Ophrys tenthredinifera, Ophrys scolopax and Ophrys lutea* were all blooming. It was a good spot. As I was finishing searching the area I became aware of another person kneeling in the herbage, photographing a specimen of *O. italica.* Naturally I made contact. The man was Portugese but he had lived in Germany for at least twenty years. We chatted and later he joined my wife and myself for lunch at a taverna a few miles down the road. Here I began to realise how organised the Germans can be.

I asked my new contact if he had found *Orchis provincalis* ? Yes, he had, on Profitis Elias. Then, in an attempt to help me pin-point the site, he asked if I carried an altimeter ? I had to say that I did not. Apparently the Germans always have them. However, he managed to instruct me very successfully, without altimeter, and later in the week I found *O. provincalis* together with the man orchid, *Acerus anthropophorum,* and *Neotinea maculata* close by. In our further conversation my friend raised the subject of books. Was I using Davis and Huxley for the orchids ? He suggested, very politely, that the book was twenty years out of date and produced the two volumes he was carrying. They were recent German publications and the layout and the illustrations were very impressive. Finally I asked where next he was going ? He pulled out a map, far superior to anything which I had been able to find in England, and attached was a computer printout listing all the known sites for orchids in Rhodes and saying what species could be found at each place. Apparently the German orchid society has all the known European orchid sites listed in the computer together with details of the species each site supports. Members travelling abroad can be briefed in a very efficient way. So, my friend was proceeding 0.6 Kilometers eastwards from the taverna to a position, forest dominated by *Pinus halepensis,* where he would find the species detailed on his printout. I went along briefly and certainly I have never seen such a dense population of *Limodorum abortivum.*

Travel extends one's horizons.

Reg Jones.

PROGRAMME

With the start of the excursion season, it seems an appropriate time to write a note on field trips for the benefit of new members, or those who have not joined them before. Unless otherwise stated in the programme, we meet at 11.00 a.m. and are taken round an area until about 1.00 p.m., when we return to our cars for a picnic lunch. Some people may wish to leave then, while others continue for an hour or two in the afternoon. Members can also join the excursion at about 2.00 p.m. if they are unable to come in the morning. Where it is not possible to return to the cars for lunch we indicate in the programme that a portable picnic is required.

It is seldom possible to give a specific topic for an excursion as so much can be found in each habitat. Our "experts" are knowledgeable in many fields and are happy to point out and identify anything they can. Spider hunters are equally welcome on a fungus foray, and most of us, who just have a very general interest, can learn something new on every outing.

June 2nd: Please note that there will be a charge of 50p for parking on the excursion to Mossymere Wood,

NORWICH AREA LOCAL NATURE RESERVES

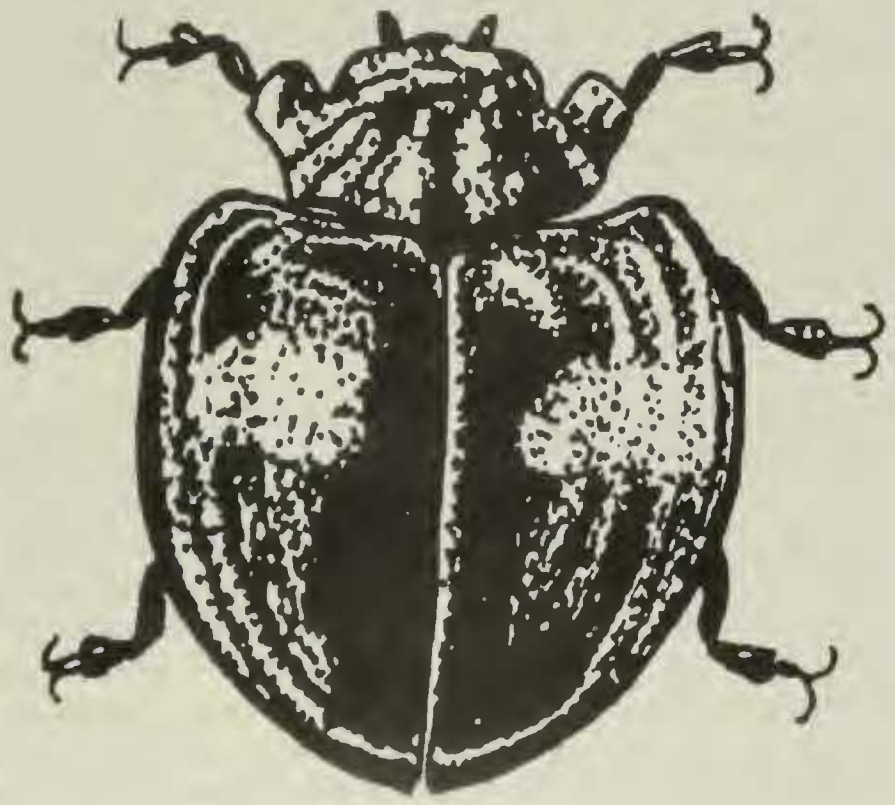
The Society's Research Committee has been asked to organise surveys of a number of Local Nature Reserves in and around the City, and it has proved feasible to include two field meetings in the 91/92 programme (similar to the one last year at Barrow Common) where we hope to bring together a number of members with special interests, especially in the more "obscure" branches of Natural History.

The meetings will be at Marston Marshes on Saturday 20th July and Bowthorpe Marsh on Sunday 1st September. Though any records will add grist to the mill, we are particularly keen to include Arthropods, Molluscs and Worms.

It would be very helpful to know in advance if you are prepared to help with these investigations, either by dropping me a line at 17, High Street, Wells, NR23 1EW, or by phoning me on Fakenham (0328) 710533.

Paul Banham, Chairman, Research Committee.

OVERWINTERING SITE FOR THE KIDNEY-SPOT LADYBIRD



In Britain, all species of ladybird overwinter as adults, each species choosing a characteristic site in which to do so. Majerus & Kearns (1989) list *Chilocorus renipustulatus,* overwintering sites are not known with certainty. On three occasions in the past couple of years I have come across specimens apparently overwintering in exposed situations on the trunks of alder trees at least 4 metres from the ground. In each case, the alders were being felled for conservation purposes (Gresham's School, Holt, 18-9-89; Mannington Estate, Saxthorpe, 23-9-89 and Thursford Wood, 3-4-91). Dr Majerus tells me that he had assumed that the ladybirds descended the trees (where they feed on coccids) in winter but had never been able to find them.

The Kidney-spot, with its two red blotches on black shield-shaped wing cases, occurs locally in Southern England and seems to be particularly abundant in Norfolk. It is one of twenty species (out of a national total of twenty-four) which have been recorded from the county in the last ten years by the Cambridge Ladybird Survey. Despite this, there are no records for even the commonest species from many 10 Km squares in Norfolk and I would be pleased to put anyone interested in touch with the Survey.

Ref: Majerus M. & Kearns P. (1989) Ladybirds: Naturalists' Handbook 10. Richmond Publishing Co. Ltd.

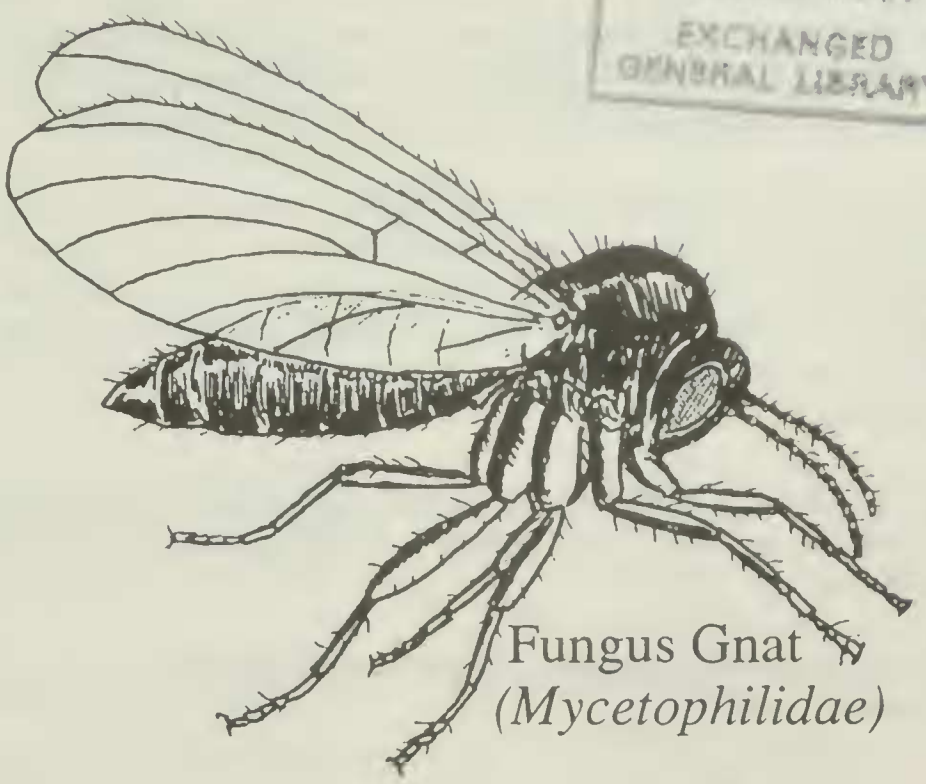
Tony Leech (Holt 712282)

OYSTER FUNGUS *(Pleurotus ostreatus)*

On 28th November 1990 we visited Wayland Wood and found a specimen of the above species hanging from a tree. This was very much decayed and was of interest only in the orange tinge at one end of the cap.

In order to find out the nature of this orange suffusion, this was placed in a container on sterilised peat. Eventually the colour deepened and was identified as the fungus *Hypomyces aurantius,* which is not unusual growing on this and old Polypores.

Observation on this decaying fungus from December to February revealed the presence of two fungus gnat larvae *Mycetophilidae* which seemed to prefer the orange area to the wetter part of the fungus. After a time they pupated away from the fungus and have to be identified on emergence.



Fungus Gnat
(Mycetophilidae)

What is remarkable is that during the whole of the three months no mould formed on the decaying fungus it is conjectured that the *Hypomyces* was producing some agent which prevented the development of moulds.

Reg Evans.

1891 - A WHALE OF A YEAR !

The lesser Rorqual Whale *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* is among the commonest of the cetaceans which have occurred along our coast. Even so any example of this group found washed up on the shoreline or, even beached, is a scarce thing indeed nowadays. Alive individual would earn much attention from at least the national press, and many prayers for its safe return to the sea.

One hundred years ago such an event caused quite a stir and proved lucrative for several people.

On Monday, 8th June 1891 a 30ft long Lesser Rorqual entered Yarmouth harbour after breaking its upper jaw against the south pier. Several local fisherman, using harpoons, pursued the animal but it was the valiant crew of the Gorleston lifeboat, the "Elizabeth Simpson" who succeeded in capturing the whale and took it, tail first, into the lifeboat shed. Many locals were thus invited to view this poor creature, laying on its side with its lower jaw raised by ropes to keep the huge mouth open.

On the first two days of the "Exhibition" an estimated 2,200 people passed through the turnstile. On the Thursday the whale was dissected by local veterinary surgeon Mr. Shipley, in the company of a large audience which included several leading citizens of the borough and a number of invited naturalists, Thomas Southwell among them. Arthur Patterson gave a lecture on Norfolk Whales and proclaimed to loud cheers that "Gorleston men are not of the right sort to let a prize escape them for want of a plucky try".

The Yarmouth Independent newspaper reported that "The skin was one and a half inches thick, little fat was to be seen... the thick solid flesh... was of a dark hue, similar to the colour of stale beef. As the work progressed barrels of tar were in requisition to kill the disagreeable effluvium, which caused several of the more sensitive to leave the building... A young man, looking too closely into the matter, had his nose accidentally slit by the Veterinary's knife".

Walter Lowne, the Yarmouth taxidermist preserved the whale before it toured the country as an exhibition piece. Arthur Patterson had purchased the creature from the local boatmen and it proved a great success on Yarmouth seafront during the holiday season of the following year.

In September 1892 it was auctioned by J.W. De Caux, of Yarmouth. Mr. Hannant, a hotel proprietor, bought it for £62.

Michael Bean.

SPRING FUNGI

It is not always realised that there are Spring fungi as well as Autumn fungi, although they are not so numerous and some of them occur also in the Autumn. This year has been partially good from reports coming in and we may have some good results this year from the Morel species.

Whilst we were looking after the display in the Assembly House on Saturday 20th April, we were presented with a fine specimen of *Morchella elata*. This morel we had not seen in the 16 years since we returned to Norfolk. As we were recording the Fungus Survey of Warwickshire for some 12 years we observe that there is a report of just one siteing.

Morchella elata is not inconspicuous, being about 150 mm high and about 60 - 80 mm wide. If widespread it would most certainly have come to our notice.

We are grateful to Maureen Loades for adding this new record to our card index.

Morchella elata

Reg & Lil Evans.

HERE TODAY

Verpa conica is a fungus belonging to the same group as the morels. This species has a bell shaped light to dark brown cap hanging from the top of a cream coloured stalk. This stalk has horizontal bands of light brown granules. In morchells and mitrophora the caps bear polygonal pits but verpa does not.

It seems to have been seldom recorded in the country and in South-East England only 13 collections up to 1976. In Norfolk there are records in 1873 and 1875 - any later records have not come to my notice.

We were pleased to find several specimens of *Verpa conica* in one site this year (Lilian Evans) and had only seen the species in 1962 in Warwickshire.

In 1977 following the hot dry year of 1976 there were many more records (but not apparently in Norfolk). This spring fungus could well occur elsewhere in Norfolk in damp situations in moss under Hawthorn or Hazel.

Reg & Lil Evans.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

This is to remind members that their subscription was due on the 1st April. Cheques should be made payable to :- **Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society.**
Annual Subscription rates are: Ordinary £8.00. Family £10.00.
Please send to:- Honorary Treasurer, Mr. D.A. Dorling, "St. Edmundsbury", 6, New Road, Hethersett, Norwich. NR9 3HH.

WARNING

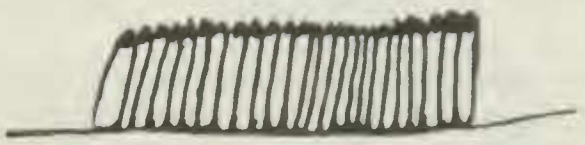
If your Subscription has lapsed for more than one year and the Hon Treasuer has not received your subscription by the 1st August 1991. Your name will be deleted from the membership roll. Colin Dack, Membership Secretary.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEXT NATTERJACK should be sent to Colin Dack, 12, Shipdham Road, Toftwood, Dereham Norfolk. NR19 1JJ. To arrive not later than **1st July 1991.** Contributions sent after this date will not be accepted for the August Natterjack.

In your next Natterjack "THE ORCHIDS OF SUFFOLK" *book review by Alec Bull. A leaflet (order form) for this excellent book by Martin Sanford, published ny the Suffolk Naturalists' Society is enclosed with this Natterjack.*

CULEX PIPIENS (THE COMMON GNAT)

Last July, I was handed a jar of pond water by a gentleman who is aware of my interests in the goings on in freshwater habitats. The water came from a pond that had stood in a state of decay for some time with a few remaining inches of water gradually evaporating away and being only replenished by the occasional shower.

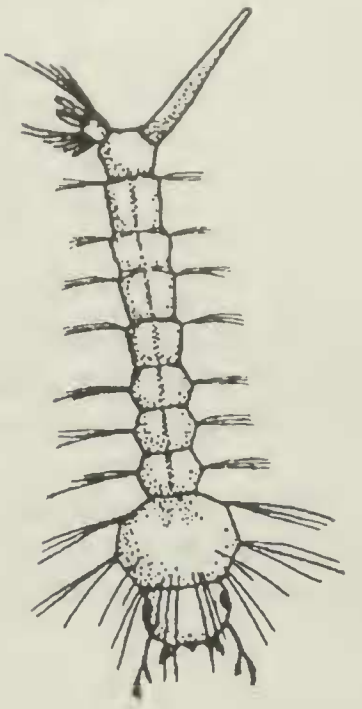


Egg raft

A first look in the jar, suggested plenty of aquatic life, but a close examination revealed merely the various stages of a species of mosquito known to science as *Culex pipiens* or the common gnat.

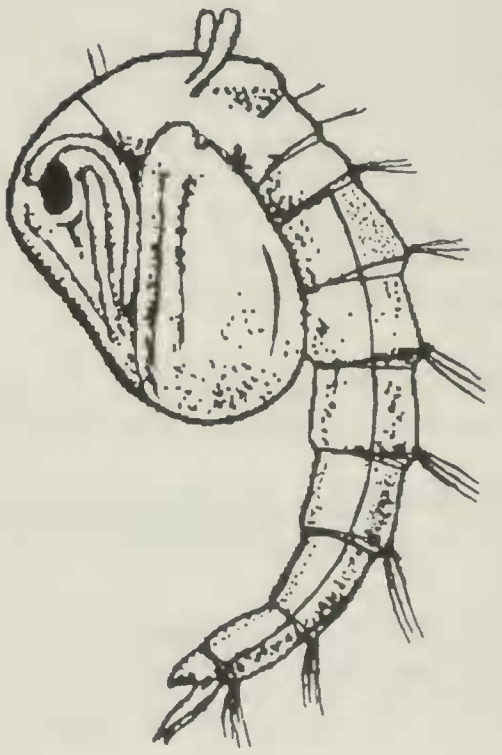
Culex pipiens is the commonest of around twenty five species of *Culicine* mosquitos known in Britain and they may be found breeding in such places as garden water butts or indeed any other receptacle that stands containing water for any length of time.

The eggs are laid in stagnant water in batches of two to three hundred, glued together to form a raft that remains floating on the surface of the water, this raft is unsinkable and no matter what misfortunes befall it, it will always right itself and keep the eggs remaining dry.



Larva

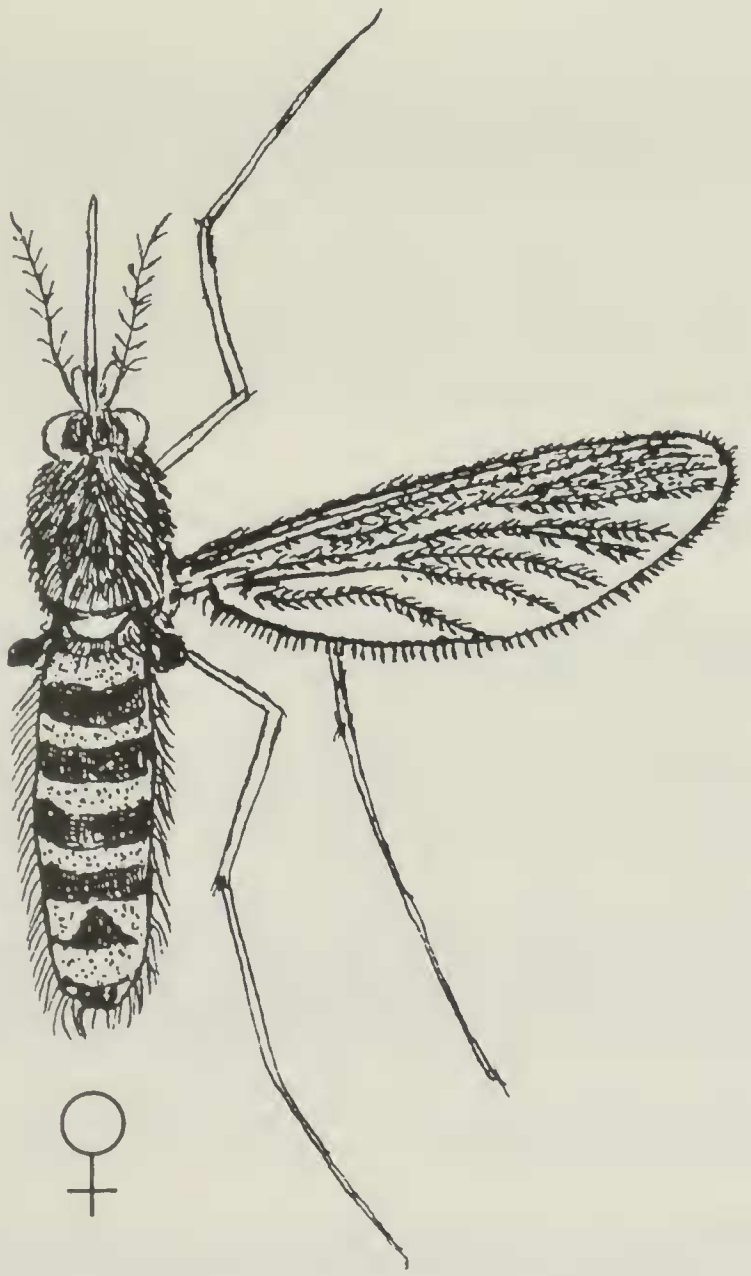
The larva on hatching, leave the cigar shaped egg by the bottom and makes it's way to the surface and suspends itself from the surface film and takes in air through it's long breathing tube. The larva spends most of it's time on the bottom rising occasionally to the surface to take in air and then wriggles back to the bottom where it makes it's way around, feeding continuously.



Pupa

It grows fairly quickly, outgrowing it's skeletal skin and moulting three times and after three weeks, it turns into a pupa and assumes a completely different shape.

The creature now looks like a comma, a large head and a tail like structure with a large black dot on it's head, in this state, they do not feed at all but spend most of it's time at the surface, taking in air through a trumpet like structure on the head. They propel themselves by flapping the tail up and down. often in less than a week, the pupal case splits and the imago emerges, the pupal skin floats to the surface



Culex pipiens
Adult Female
Drawing by Ken Durrant

and acts as a platform from which the adult mosquito can make it's initial flight after it's wings have hardened.

As an adult, they are mainly nocturnal although they can at times be found during daylight hours.

Culex pipiens is rarely responsible for biting humans, usually confining their attentions to biting birds and they do not carry Malaria or Yellow Fever, this dismal responsibility falls to a species known as *Anopheles,* of which we have four species in Britain, all of which are capable of transmitting the disease. With regard to the biting habits of *Culex pipiens,* it is only the females that draw blood.

Tony Brown.

NORWICH FRINGE PROJECT

Two of the excursions in the new programme have been organised in conjunction with the Norwich fringe project; They are on the 14th July at Marston Marshes and 4th August at St. Faith's Common. The meeting will be published in the Projects programme which is widely circulated throughout the Norwich area.

Bob Cronk, - Project officer writes:- " The Project, which in addition to the City, is funded by the Countryside Commission, Norfolk County Council, Broadland and South Norfolk District Councils, and the Broads Authority, has a key philosophy behind it of promoting the improvement and enjoyment of the countryside surrounding Norwich for the benefit of local residents and visitors.

Although (hopefully) many people in Norwich will be aware of the valuable landscapes we have both in and around the City (the Yare and Wensum Valleys, Mousehold Heath, Horsford and Felthorpe Woods), the area as a whole may not automatically be considered at first glance at least, as an informal recreational area or rich in wildlife. People live and work in or near it and drive through it to get to the "real" countryside. In terms of countryside recreation and countryside management, urban fringes are generally under used and under-valued.

Although Norwich is perhaps better off than most cities in that the Council realises the potential of its open spaces, the value of landscapes and areas of nature conservation value and has many excellent examples, the City fringe as a whole (which will include parts of South Norfolk and Broadland Districts and Broads Authority Executive Area) has much potential for new informal recreation and education.

Much is inaccessible because it is private or is beyond reach of those without transport, or not suitable for the less able. The Project will hopefully be able to improve this situation.

Many excellent examples do already exist- the M & GN Railway Path/Marriots Way, the Riverside and Yare Valley Walks, but perhaps these suffer in that they have none or few links or circular routes between or radiating from them.

Although a key aim of the Project is the improvement of informal recreation, the areas of landscape and nature conservation management will not be forgotten. Again, many fine examples exist but the development of a green corridors, the management of riverside fens and meadows will hopefully come into the scope of the Project.

Encompassing all of the work is the involvement of local people. Education through participation will be a priority. But the Project will hopefully have a wider remit here in its enabling role. In these times of growing environmental awareness people quite often want to improve their local community open space, village pond, etc., but do not know what to do or where to ask to find out.

I hope the Project will be able to support and where necessary guide this community action."

Both excursions are, of course, open to all members. We will particularly welcome volunteers to assist the leaders should the numbers of visitors exceed our expectations.

Members wishing to help in recording the area should note that the Research Committee have organised a meeting on the following Saturday (20th July).

M. Ewles, Chairman Programme Commitee.