THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK

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PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING ALTERATION TO THE PROGRAMME:

The talk entitled "Hide and Seek" to be given by David Cottridge has had to be changed from 23rd January to **Saturday 6th February 1993** as the speaker now has to go to Nepal in January. The time and venue are unchanged - 2.30 p.m. in Lecture Theatre 2 at the University of East Anglia. The talk has been arranged in conjunction with the Norwich RSPB group, and further details will be notified in due course.

CONSERVATION ISSUES - A PERSONAL VIEW

The Society's Objects include the protection of "endangered species" and throughout its history it has been involved in conservation matters. It was closely associated with the Breydon Water nature reserve and the provision of a "watcher" there to supervise the wildfowling in the close season. Also it was active in the Norfolk Wild Bird Protection Committee in the early 1920's.

Today we are regularly asked to support various objections to new developments which have an impact on our heritage. As individuals we are all drawn into these problems from time to time and no doubt many members have written, like me, letters of protest to Members of Parliament and local planning authorities. The "not in my back yard" syndrome can have a powerful influence on our decisions in these matters and I suspect that some of my protests have been emotionally based rather than built on firm facts.

When the Society is asked to add its weight to such protests it cannot afford the luxury of basing its comments on emotion but must be able to support its arguments with facts. This we try to do using, where appropriate, the services of our Research Committee under the able chairmanship of Paul Banham. He is able to call upon many experts from amongst our membership to give specialist support to our collective views, thus adding weight to our protest.

As individuals we can also increase the effect of our own protests if we are able to quote facts and figures. Thus it is desirable that we all watch **and record** all significant natural history finding in our local patch because we never know when such records will come in useful to back up our efforts to protect the local environment. The moral is - keep a diary and/or note book. They could prove to be valuable tools in the fight for the environment.

Don Dorling.

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

Regular readers of Natterjack will be aware of my interest in the grasshoppers and bush-crickets of Norfolk, and in their interrelation with the history of the countryside, particularly the distribution of ancient commons as portrayed on Faden's 1797 map of Norfolk (published in book form by Larks Press, Dereham).

This season I have concentrated on trying to identify the western boundary of the Dark Bush-cricket *Pholidoptera griseoaptera* which coincides with the change from the ancient countryside of small fields and mixed species hedgerows in the east, to a more modern, planned countryside of enclosed open fields and sheepwalks, with regulation hawthorn hedges in the west.

Our journey begins at Fakenham, where the insect can be heard chirping from rough vegetation at Hempton Common and followed westward along roadside ditches and hedges to Reynolds Plantation (TF8828), but suddenly as we cross the upper reaches of the Wensum (here flowing northwards before curving past Fakenham into the Wensum valley) all is silent. Not a sound was heard as I journeyed south through Tatterford, Helhoughton and West Raynham, but as I crossed back over the Wensum to East Reynham, the insect was suddenly abundant again on the roadside verges of the A1065 (TF8824).

Turning south on minor roads, bush-crickets were present at Uphouses (8823), Wellingham (8721) and Litcham Heath (8620). On the ground these sites are nothing special, just roadside verges in arable countryside; but on Faden's map all these are central to large areas of common or heathland.

The next sites southward are at Litcham itself, on the B1145 entering the town from the west, and at Litcham Common. To the west I have failed to find them at Lexham or Great Dunham.

Continuing southward we meet the Dereham to Swaffham railway line at Great Fransham, where Dark Bush-cricket is present; and this line seems to have provided a corridor for expansion to the west, for the species can be found in close proximity to the railway at Little Dunham (8613), Palgrave (8310), (with a bridleway hedge link to Swaffham Plashes 8210), Tumbler Hill (828098) on the east side of Swaffham, and 1km west of Swaffham at TF805095 where the Swaffham bypass rejoins the old A47. There was no sound of the insect further along the railway at Swaffham Raceway.

Heading back eastward, the Swaffham to Watton railway now comes into play as the western boundary for the insect. It is present at the TF825095 road bridge in Swaffham, on the Peddars Way crossing at TF8507, at Park Farm, Saham (TF9105), Ovington (TF9102), Wayland Wood (TL9299) and Stow Bedon station (TL9496). All of the sites outside Swaffham are ancient woodland or commons on Faden's map. It is possible that some sites west of this railway remain to be discovered, but recent visits to North Pickenham Warren, South Pickenham, Ashill and Saham Toney drew blanks.

I have not yet researched the area south of Stow Bedon, but I have some interesting challenges ahead before I link up with the next known site, 12km away at Harling 5-ways. Will the distribution follow the railway and head for Hockham and Roudham, or will it be much further to the east with the River Thet providing the boundary between Shropham and Harling? Wherever the boundary lies, it will be abrupt, and that is what makes this insect so fascinating.

I remain interested in all records of grasshoppers, bush-crickets, groundhoppers and earwigs from anywhere in the county. Ones which show new tetrads relative to the distribution maps published in the 1991 Transactions article are particularly important. Why not look them out now before you forget?

David Richmond, 42 Richmond Rise, Reepham, Norfolk. NR10 4LS.

MORSTON QUAY

A walk from the National Trust car park at Morston on Sunday 20th September, illustrated just how important the estuary is as a wintering ground and refuelling stop-over for waders.

The track beside Morston Creek, much improved with new bridges, led us to the sandy path parallel to the Blakeney Channel - and almost at once produced fine views of large numbers of waders.

Some grey and golden plovers and dunlin were still wholly or partly in their black summer garb. In among the noisy, showy oystercatchers and lapwing were curlew, redshank, turnstone, greenshank and ringed plovers.

Heron and cormorant entertained us with fly-pasts, and there were four species of gull in evidence - great and lesser black-backed, common and black-headed.

After lunch, we walked westward along the Greens and found a fine viewpoint looking out over Stiffkey Freshes. We already knew before we reached there that we would be seeing large flocks of bar-tailed godwit and Brent geese because a foolhardy microlight pilot had put up the birds by flying very low over the mudflats. One Brent in his propeller and he would have met a muddy end.

As with the plovers and dunlin, some of the godwits were in summer plumage, a few still showing rich chestnut all over.

It was the wrong time of year for duck but small numbers of wigeon and shelduck were seen.

With, by chance, both tide and weather perfect, a good day's birding at one of the most evocative places in Norfolk.

David Paull.

FUNGUS FORAY : HOCKERING WOOD

On 30th June this year, with permission, a small group visited this site. This was expected to be more a social occasion than a fungus recording event. However the following uncommon to rare species were found.

Masses of brown jelly-like material on fallen branches were *Tremella foliacea* recorded here previously but not at all common elsewhere. From dead fallen conifer branches arose the yellowish 'antlers' of *Calocera pallido-spathulata* which has become common in Norfolk in recent years.

Perhaps the biggest surprise was the toadstool *Megacollybia platyphylla* (in older books this is *Tricholomopsis platyphylla*). There were about 100-150 specimens scattered throughout the wood. It seems particularly common in this wood, even at this early date, having been recorded here on several occasions. This fungus has a cap 6-15cms in diameter with radiating brown fibrils on a paler background. The gills are broad and white. At the base of the cream coloured stipe there are usually white long cords in the leaf litter. Hockering Wood seems to suit this fungus!

Reg & Lil Evans

WEEVIL ENEMY

On a recent foray we came upon nests of a black and yellow solitary wasp. There were about 50 holes made in the sandy soil and the wasps were continually arriving and leaving. One of these wasps was examined and found to be *Cerceris arenaria* which was carrying a small weevil *Otiorhynchus singularis*.

These weevils are caught and left in the tunnel as food for the young of the solitary wasp.

Reg Evans.

A FLY - NEW TO ENGLAND

The study of fungi often leads into other areas of natural history and I have been interested in the association of various insects with them.

As a result the life history of some fungus gnats has been clarified and a number of new Norfolk records produced, with the help of a specialist.

Among these results is a fly previously known from a few Scottish records *Allodia czernyi - mycetophilidae*.

Reg Evans.

SPIDER KILLER

On one of our forays a folded leaf was examined and found to contain a dead spider, and also two larvae of a spider wasp. These were mottled with white spots on a grey background and both ends pale.

From these after pupation emerged a male and female spider wasp *Zaglyptus varipes*. We have recorded this before in the county from another area where the larvae had eaten both the spider and its eggs, but in this case only the remains of a dead clubiona spider were present.

Reg Evans.

"THINGS IN STICKS"

Solitary wasps do not form large colonies as do the social wasps with which most people are familiar. Each female solitary wasp make a nest for her young and and many of these are to be found in dead twigs and decayed wood. Her work may be apparent as holes bored in the pith of woody stems.

Within the tunnels she brings prey which may be aphids, spiders, flies etc according to her species. About 50 of these nests have been examined, the insects reared and mostly released.

This proved a rewarding study as in addition to the solitary wasps there emerged parasites - flies, ichneumon wasps, ruby tail wasps and chalcids.

As an example one collection - a dead buddleia stem produced solitary wasps *Rhopalum coarctatum* and *Crossocerus walkeri* 'Ruby tailed wasp' *Trychrysis cyanea* and a fly (*Metopia* species - to be confirmed). Another nest produced the ichneumon *Perithous divinator*.

It is likely that many of these harmless insects nests find their way as prunings to the garden bonfire

Reg Evans.

STINGLESS NETTLES

For many years British botanists have known a narrow-leaved and almost stingless nettle growing in Wicken and Chippenham Fens. In "A Flora of Cambridgeshire" (1964) this is stated to be "probably referable to forma *angustifolia*", i.e. a supposed variant of the common stinging nettle *Urtica dioica*. In 1991 a botanist from St. Petersburg (D. V. Geltman) examined the Wicken Plants and decided these were a new British Species of nettle, *Urtica galeopsifolia,* which has quite a distinct range of habitat - damp woodlands, river banks and fens. He has recognised the species in Central and Eastern Europe. The spotting features in the field (which are not totally reliable) are longer and distinctly narrower leaves and non-stinging hairs. Generally speaking, these plants have up to now been thought to be forms of the common stinging nettle and as such not often mentioned specially in British County and local Floras, but where recognised they have been variously called forma *angustifolia,* variety *angustifolia* and variety *inermis*.

I was first shown the plant many years ago in the damp areas adjoining the Ouse Washes near Welches Dam on a joint field meeting with Norfolk and Cambridgeshire botanists when it was named by the latter variety *inermis*. Since then I have noted such plants as I saw them casually when botanising for other purposes. I have Norfolk records from Harford Tip, the River Walk Norwich, Lenwade, Ringland, Santon Downham, and quite recently on the Thorpe St. Andrew side of the River Yare near Whitlingham Reach. All these were wetland sites.

A full description of our plants must await the second edition of Flora Europaea (in press) but as well as features stated it is stated that *U. galeopsifolia* has its lowest flowering branches between the 13th and 22nd nodes; in common stinging nettle these are between 7th and 14th nodes. Significantly, the chromosome number of the stingless plant is only half that of the common nettle. In the 1st edition of Flora Europaea *U. galopsifolia* is only referred to in the Index (in italics) indicating the authors then considered it to be just one of the states of our common nettle.

It seems likely that the Norfolk plants are the same as the Cambridgeshire species and this note is intended to draw Members' attention to the situation. *U. galeopsifolia* is easily noticed from leaf shape, habitat and the absence of stinging to be tested by brushing the back of the hand along the upper leaf margins. Sometimes you may guess wrong! The plants should be placed on record when found.

Reference: Geltman, D.V. (1992). *Urtica galeopsifolia* Wierzb. ex Opiz (Urticaceae) In Wicken Fen (E. England). Watsonia Vol. 19 PT.2 Pp. 127-129.

E.T. Daniels.

TWO NEW RECORDS FOR NORFOLK DURING AUGUST 1992

The first is a gall formed on sweetcorn or forage maize. Appearing like a small, greenish/white clenched fist on any part of the plant, when split it sheds blackish spores. Rex identified it as sweetcorn smut, *Ustilago maydis*, which is associated with hot summers, first becoming significant in Great Britain in 1975/76. (See Collins Guide to the Pests, Diseases and Disorders of Garden Plants, Stephan Buczacki and Keith Harris, illus. Brian Hargreaves).

The second record is of a fungus. A phone call to us from a reader of EDP's 'In the Countryside' articles described a funny toadstool, which had come up in some potting compost purchased from a garden centre. Specimens were subsequently brought to Radio Norfolk in a plant pot for us to look at.

I would describe the colour as 'fluorescent-sock yellow' and hope this gives readers the correct mental picture! The toadstools, averaging 2½" in height and 1½" across, were flocked with scales on stipe and cap

and were exceedingly beautiful.

Unfortunately by the time they were transported to Taverham the colour had faded and they were collapsing and drying. I dried out one to take to Reg Evans and consulted what literature we had. In the Marcel Bon (Collins) page 289 I found what looked to be exactly right, *Leucocoprinus birnbaumii*. However Reg Evans was consulted and after careful scrutiny he gave me the thumbs up. He himself had not seen it for many years and it was definitely a new record for Norfolk. He has added the dried specimen to his already large reference collection.
This tropical species manifests itself in greenhouses and glasshouses due to the humidity and heat.

Barbara Hancy.

Over the years on occasions, I have kept aquariums for the purpose of observing various aquatic creatures that I have at times taken from the wild, from ponds or other areas of water. I have successfully bred three spined sticklebacks, I have raised dragonflies and damselflies from nymphs, aquatic beetles from their respective larva and of course frogs and toads from tadpoles. some time ago, I raised some caddisflies of the species *Limnophilus flavicornis* to adulthood from the larval stage. The habits of the larvae were of great interest to me but it was the larval case itself that interested me most.

This species constructs some of its cases from the very small shells of snails and limpets, all carefully cemented together to form a hollow tube a little over an inch long with a small opening at either end.

On several occasions I have observed that certain of the shells attached to the case contained live specimens of snails or limpets and in many instances these tiny molluscs have lived for long periods of time in this way. When one considers the habits of these tiny creatures, crawling around on the bottom of ponds or on submerged foliage in order to obtain their food, I find it very difficult to understand how they can sustain life whilst being held fast to the caddis case and thus unable to feed themselves.

Often when the caddis imago has emerged and I have dried the case out, the glue that held them so tightly together in the water, still bonds the shells to such an extent that any attempt to prise a shell away from the case, usually ends up by breaking into pieces before it yields from its bond. They will still hold together in this way many years after its tenant has left.

Tony Brown.

SPIDER EGGS DESTROYED

A flat egg sac was found in a folded leaf and a spider *Xysticus ulmi* was present and was allowed to escape. The egg sac contained no eggs but only the cocoon of a parasite *Trychosis legator*. This seems to choose only this particular spiders egg sac for her young.

Reg Evans.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE TRANSACTIONS WILL MEMBERS PLEASE SEND CONTRIBUTIONS TO PETER LAMBLEY, THE COTTAGE, ELSING ROAD, LYNG, NORWICH, NORFOLK. He has now taken over as Editor, as R. (Dick) Jones has retired.

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 January 1993.** Contributions arriving after this date will not be accepted for the February Natterjack.