

Number 40

THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK



February 1993

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

BITTERN BATTLES ON.

At the beginning of December 1992, Miss Pat Buckle of Sheringham, who is known locally for her work with injured wildlife, had a bittern passed on to her. The bittern was picked up on the coast road at Cley and appeared to have a damaged wing. Miss Buckle fed the bird on sprats and water, a diet it seemed to cope with admirably, until such time as it could be taken to Pensthorpe Waterfowl Park, near Fakenham. The photograph (taken by Cherry) shows the bittern prior to its transfer to Pensthorpe. At Pensthorpe the bittern was attended to by local vet Mr.



Gordon Brown, who performed a most delicate operation which required the placing of both internal and external pins to set its damaged wing. At the time of writing (Dec. 22nd.) it is reported that the bittern is alive and recovering. It is still on a diet of sprats (with antibiotics) and is held in a small enclosure with an infra-red heat lamp. Since the injury to the wing was possibly a fortnight old before treatment, it is not sure if it will regain the full use of the wing, although it has been estimated to have a 1 in 10 chance of flying again. If recovery is satisfactory the bittern will, of course, be released back into the wild.

Francis and Cherry Farrow.

SPRING OUTING TO HICKLING BROAD

The excursion planned for Sunday 16th May is limited to 24 members due to boats available and the size of observation hides. **Booking in writing needs to be received by Michael Seago (33 Acacia Road, Thorpe St. Andrew, Norwich. NR7 0PP) by April 30th at the latest.** A variety of migrants should be on show; also Marsh Harriers. By courtesy of Mr. Chistopher Cadbury, Whiteslea Lodge (and its collection of bird paintings) will be open for members during the afternoon - a unique opportunity!

BADGERS PAST....

The considerable interest and correspondence in the local press about Norfolk badgers recently reminded me of my one and only encounter with Brock.

Back in 1964 there was a report that a badger had been killed by a car near Pretty Corner, Sheringham. Later, while walking around the area I found a boar badger, unfortunately dead, killed not by a car, but presumably by a gamekeeper or such-like as it was hanging in a tree (see illustration).

Taking this memory further I checked the 1970, 1980, and 1987-91 Bird and Mammal Reports for any update on the status of N. Norfolk badgers. In the 1980 paper on "Norfolk Badgers 1971-1981" by A.E. Vine I read that a pregnant sow badger was killed by a car and that a boar had been snared from a sett occupied up to 1971. The sett was located in woodland that has been subsequently divided by the "new" main road between Cromer and Holt and "developed" in part to accomodate the local council rubbish tip. It seems strange that the circumstances and location of the badger I found and those reported are the same. My photograph is dated 14th. March, 1964. Could there have been a discrepancy in the 1980 report? If so it means that badgers were lost from this site 7 years earlier, however, it is still over 20 years since badgers were seen at this location. I found no references to the re-colonisation of the area but maybe someone is "in the know" and is safe-guarding a sett. I would like to think so as it would be a great pity if the badger is lost from the Cromer-Holt ridge forever.

Francis Farrow.



Can you fill the gaps in Norfolk's Natural History?

From "FAUNA AND FLORA OF NORFOLK Part III. Fungi by Charles B. Plowright, M.R.C.S." NNNS Transactions 1872.

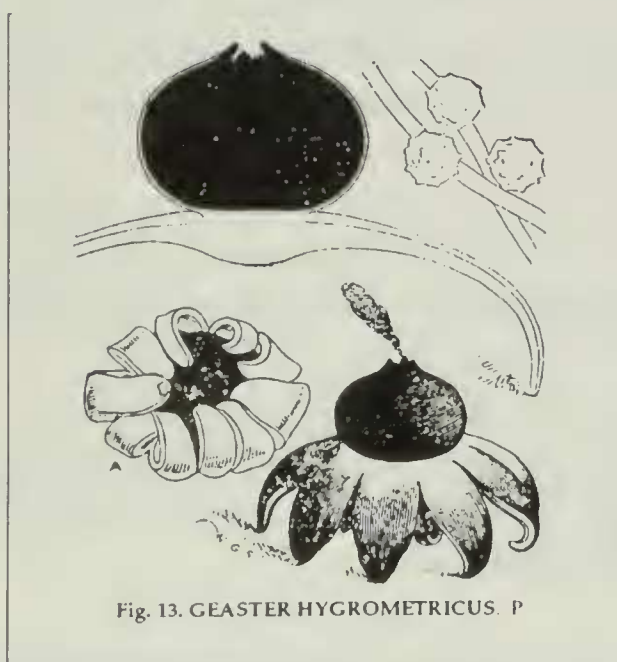


Fig. 13. GEASTER HYGROMETRICUS. P

Have you checked the contents of your attic or dusted great uncle's library lately? The following missing part volumes of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Transactions are required to complete the run from 1869. The majority of the volumes, the former property of Lt. Col. J. E. Gurney, were obtained at the Tacolneston Hall auction last May. When combined with my own run from 1963 (Bird and Mammal Reports) and 1970 (Transactions) 18 parts remained outstanding, however, thanks to Don and Mary Dorling and Richard Hobbs a further 14 parts were obtained from the NNT. This left four parts to locate, but thanks to Tony Irwin and Alec Bull, who kindly supplied a further part each, only the following two parts are now required.

Volume XII	Part II	1925-26	Transactions
Volume XIII	Part I	1929-30	Transactions

If you can offer any of the above Transactions to help complete the set then please contact me:
Francis Farrow, "Heathlands", 6 Havelock Road, Sheringham, Norfolk, NR26 8QD.
Tel: (0263) 823775.

PHOTOGRAPHIC GROUP

The Photographic Group is just completing a successful tenth season during which the small but regular band of supporters has enjoyed a wide variety of talks both instructive in photographic techniques and entertaining. For all of this period the Group has been organised and lead by Bob Robinson, who is known both nationally and internationally for his pictorial and natural history photographic prowess.

Bob has now decided that he must relinquish this role and all members of the Group will miss his knowledge and time which has been so freely given. All of those who have attended these sessions over the ten years will, I am sure, wish to join with me in thanking Bob for his efforts on our behalf.

The Group will continue in being and all members of the Society are welcome to attend these informal monthly meeting at the Assembly House. The dates for next session will be published in the Programme in due course.

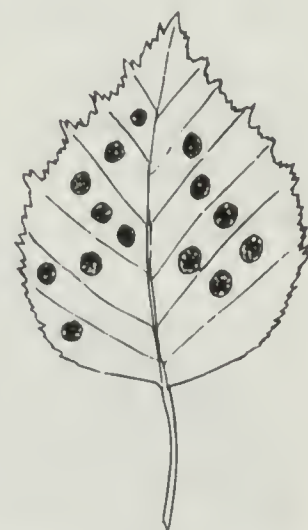
Don Dorling.

GALLS IN ABUNDANCE ON THE OAKS

From the almost complete disappearance of Spangle galls in 1991, not only in Norfolk but in the country as a whole, to the magnificent showing in 1992, certainly needs some explaining.

All over the county last autumn I found the three main Spangle galls in surprisingly large numbers. On Foulden Common one side of a large oak had nearly all of its leaves covered underneath with Silk-button galls, so that each leaf resembled a felt patch. I took ten leaves at random and on counting the galls averaged out at 190 per leaf. In the past I have seen odd leaves with up to 250 separate galls, but I have never seen such a mass of affected leaves before.

The common Spangle galls although numerous did not seem to be common as were the Smooth Spangle galls which I found in larger numbers than in the past. Oak apples during the summer were also extremely abundant. Some of the oaks on Beeston Common resemble apple trees in fruit, they had so many galls on them.



Cherry galls were also very numerous. I found leaves with up to five galls on their undersides over twenty mm. in diameter. The Knopper galls also had a field day, the ground being carpeted with them around the affected trees. Rough Marble galls now seem to be as common as the Marble gall. I found many twigs containing both species close together.

The question is what happened to the Spangle gall wasps in 1991?

Did the weather cause them to remain in galls on the ground for 12 months the year before?

Did they produce galls in the tops of the trees, out of sight from the ground, instead of on the lower leaves as normal?

Did parasites destroy most of them?

So many questions at the moment, but not many answers.

One gall which had eluded me over the years at last turned up in front of my nose when I was searching for caterpillars on birch on Beeston Common. This is the Black Blister gall on birch leaves. They appear as small circular blisters 2.5mm. in diameter situated in between the veins and are visible on both sides of the leaf. The larva of the minute midge leaves the gall and pupates in the soil in the autumn. The name of the minute midge is *Anisostephus betulinum* Kieffer.

Ken Durrant

NORFOLK BIRD REPORT 1992

A specially extended issue with additional vignettes and colour plates is planned. In addition to highly talented amateurs, no less than eight professional artists and photographers have generously agreed to provide illustrations.

Among articles it is expected to include a full-length essay covering the creation and management of the flooded fresh-marshes at Holkham NNR and also an article describing some of the main events and changes in Norfolk ornithology during the past four decades. A check-list of all the birds of Norfolk, with notes, is also planned.

Michael Seago

SPRING IS ON THE WAY

Last time I wrote of those dull damp days before Christmas. We have had a spell of grey days since Christmas but today dawned bright and clear after an overnight frost and the sun was shining again after many days absence.

The change in mood could be sensed as soon as I entered the footpath. The Rooks were noisily going about their business in the tall trees by the Hall where they have nested for many years. Across the little valley the flute like notes of a Mistle Thrush could be heard. All along the path there were Great and Blue Tits singing, the former giving fine displays of their varied repertoire. Only two of their Long Tailed cousins were seen, presumably the desire to set up breeding territories had broken up the flocks present earlier in the winter.

Across the park a unseen Kestrel was calling. Feeding on the short grass amongst the fresh mole hills was a large party of Redwings with others in the large old oaks and beeches. From these came a subdued chorus reminiscent of a party of Starlings. This was the largest gathering of our wintering thrushes that I had seen in the area since soon after arrival in the Autumn.

Lower down the path, towards the lake, three Mistle Thrushes were in dispute in the tree tops and a Nuthatch was calling loudly between bouts of feeding on the bare branches. A distant drumming was the only indication that woodpeckers were present. Two visiting drake Tufted Ducks were diving on the lake which they shared with the resident Moorhens, Coots and Mallards. In this area the strong smell of a Fox was evident in the still air.

There was also much evidence of plant growth with the shiny leaves of Lords and Ladies appearing in many places and Dogs Mercury already in flower on a sheltered bank. This, together with the songs of Chaffinches in the trees and Skylarks high above the arable fields, made today one of those "bright days before Spring". A view confirmed later when two Peacock butterflies were seen on the wing in the garden.

Don Dorling.

FOR THE RECORD

This year as in previous years I have received a number of requests for membership card. The Society does not have membership card. I believe the members making the requests could be getting the Society confused with the Trust. The Trust does have membership cards.

MORE ABOUT DIATOMS

I showed the paper about Broadland Epiphytic Diatoms (in last "Transactions") by Zandra Waterford and Bob Driscoll to Bernard Hartley, a one-time Society member and now Britain's leading diatom taxonomist. He was specially pleased to see references to two former great Norfolk diatomists - T. Brightwell and Fred Kitton, after whom several species and one genus is named. The diatom *Kittonia elaborata* is a beautiful thing "like an inverted two-legged sherry glass" and it occurs in some fossil Eocene rock deposits from Oamaru in South Island, New Zealand. Another *Kittonia* species comes from a similar-aged deposit in Kamischev, Russia. Keith Clarke adds the information that at an International Diatom Seminar he was asked by an American professor "Do you know the Berney Arms Public house?". The American was a world authority on *Chaetoceros wighamii* the type-locality of which was "in a ditch near the Berney Arms public house". It is good to know that these old Norwich workers are so famous and so relevant all these years on, particularly as one of them was a president of our Society. A few biographical details follow.

Robert Wigham

He was born in Co. Durham in 1785. As a young man he moved to Norwich and began tobacco manufacturing. A botanist of some repute, he found *Chaetoceros wighamii* which was named after him. In one of his biographies it is stated (quite wrongly) that he supplied a list of plants for Stacy's "History of the City of Norwich" (1829). In fact there is no such publication date. A search in the 1832 edition and the earlier one of 1819 reveals no list of any kind. However, in Vol.1 of Chambers' "A General History of the County of Norfolk" (1829) there is a splendid list of Norfolk plants compiled by Wigham and handsomely acknowledged. He is described as "an indefatigable scientific practical botanist and entomologist..... now a resident in this city (Norwich) where he also practices electricity and galvanism with great effect". He died in 1855.

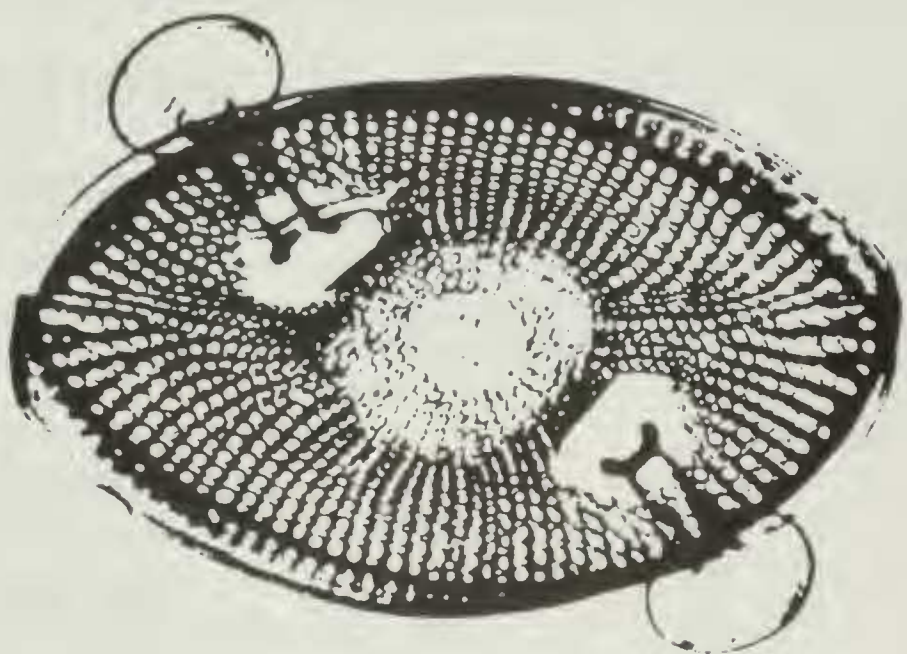
Frederick Kitton

A Founder Member of the Society and President 1873-4 he was born in Cambridgeshire in 1827 and came to Norfolk as a young man of 17 where he was assistant to Robert Wigham at the latter's shop on the Walk. He was a brilliant diatomist with many taxa named after him in the literature of the time. The genus *Kittonia* was created in his honour and he described a new species, *Brightwellia superba*, in memory of Thomas Brightwell (see below). He published County lists in our Transactions and wrote much in Science Gossip and other scientific journals in the 1860's. In the Queckett Microscopical Society's material at the Natural History Museum is a quite beautifully prepared collection of his slides. He died in 1895.

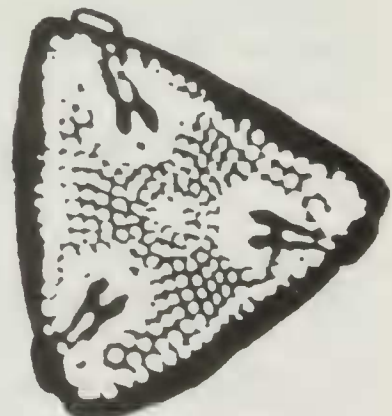
Thomas Brightwell

He was born in Ipswich in 1787 and went to live at Thorpe on his marriage in 1810. Primarily an entomologist, he lived next door to Sir. J. E. Smith in Surrey Street. He published a "Sketch of a Fauna Infusoria for East Norfolk" and named *Chaetoceros wighamii*. He did much work on the genus. He died in 1868.

Ernest Daniels.



Kittonia elaborata Grove & Sturk (x560)



Kittonia tripedia Cheneviere (x 400)

I should like to tell of a couple of more unusual experiences that I had recently. The first concerns that most feared member of the wasp family, the Hornet *Vespa crabro*, though a more peaceful creature than other members of its family. It is well known that they will hibernate in hollow trees or under loose bark or similar such places, it was under loose bark that I recently found a sleeping queen of this species. She had chewed out a fairly large hollow in the wood in which to spend the winter and was peacefully slumbering in a state of torpor when I inadvertently disturbed her. Nothing in the least bit unusual about this circumstance, I agree, but what I found most peculiar was that there was a queen of the common wasp, *Vespula vulgaris*, hibernating in the same hollow not one inch away from the hornet queen both beneath the bark. When one considers that the larger of these creatures attacks and feeds on the smaller, it was most surprising to find them hibernating together in this way.

The second tale concerns the finding of small common newts in soft and rotting stumps and decaying logs. On several occasions I have found very small specimens of these creatures tucked up in the more moist rotting fibres of the wood, usually in a very torpid state. It is well known that young newts leave the water sometime during August when they begin to breathe air. They seek out dark and damp places in which to spend the winter months and obviously such places as stumps and so forth have an attraction for them.

It is most interesting exploring in old logs and stumps during the winter in this way but one must proceed with great care since many creatures select these places in which to hibernate and it is all too easy to unnecessarily disturb, or indeed injure, such unsuspecting creatures, but there is still much to learn.

Tony Brown.

WANTED

Has anyone a copy of "A SEASON OF BIRDS" by E. Vincent and G. Lodge 1980 "FOR SALE". If not does anyone know where I can obtain a copy as this book is now out of print.

My copy was loaned out and has never been returned. My wife and I knew 'Jim Vincent' very well and would like to have a copy of this book.

Arthur Johnson 239 Spixworth Road, Old Catton, Norwich. NR6 7DZ Tel: 0603 429806

ROAD CASUALTY

It took fifty yards to take in what I had seen and another fifty to stop safely. The carcase was the size of a small dog; bloody at one end, sleek and grey at the other. It had to be an otter. Horror at its fate mingled with excitement at the prospect of close examination. Walking back towards the body, I was less than twenty yards away when a passing car provoked an un-otterlike flap from the corpse causing me to revise the identification. I was looking at a small square of red carpet, folded over to reveal its smooth grey foamback!

Tony Leech.

MICROSCOPY GROUP

1993 MEETINGS

Tuesday 20th April -

A tour of laboratories at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, St Stephens Road. Preceded by Buffet! 4.30pm
Numbers are limited so apply directly to Rex Hancy (Tel: Norwich 860042) who will advise where to meet.

Saturday 26th June -

A joint meeting with our friends from the Geological Society of Norfolk.

Meet at the West Runton beach car park at 1.30pm to collect specimens to sort in the Castle Museum from about 4.00 to 5.30pm

Further meeting for this year are being arranged More news later!

PLEASE NOTE: If you park on the Castle Mound, do not leave any valuables in your car. Listing stolen possessions is a very sorry way to end a happy meeting.

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