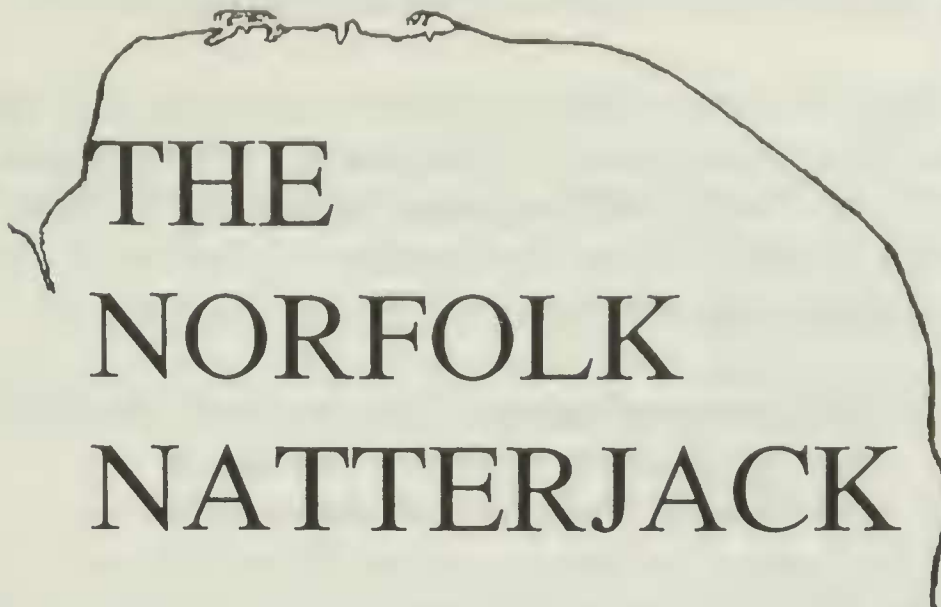




Number 41



THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK



May 1993

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

In March I represented the Society at a conference at the UEA and also at a presentation by English Nature at Beck Row. It seems appropriate to give members brief details of both occasions:

"RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS IN NORFOLK CONSERVATION"

The conference held at the UEA was organised by the Friends of Norwich Museums under the title of "Recent Achievements in Norfolk Conservation".

The principal objective was to bring together the many and diverse organisations involved in conservation of Norfolk's heritage and/or environment. Mr. Timothy Colman took the Chair and the introduction and summary were given by Mr. David Mawson. There were five presentations by specialists in their fields on the following topics -

Recent Work on the Roman Town of Caistor St. Edmund

The conservation of historic landscapes

Protecting the Norfolk Broads and their wildlife

Conservation area extensions in Norwich and

The conservation of the industrial heritage.

It was clear that there was much overlap of interest in the activities of the various organisations involved in the talks; for example the Norfolk Archaeological Trust's developments at Caistor St. Edmund will have a considerable natural history interest. It is planned to take the whole area out of arable and to grass over this large site and to lay out walks including a stretch along the River Tas, which borders the Trust's holding. Dr. Tom Williamson was also most thought provoking in his questioning of what is an historic landscape?

It was clear from the discussion in the Open Forum, which concluded the day's proceedings, that many present had found this a most useful day and it is likely to become a regular, possibly annual, event where organisations such as ours can meet and exchange views and information both formally and informally.

BRECKLAND – A TIME FOR ACTION

The object of this gathering was for English Nature to launch a document under the above heading which described the area we know as "Breckland", its importance for wildlife and set an eight point Agenda for Action. The proceedings were introduced by Mike Schofield, Director East Region of English Nature, (formerly an active member of this Society and Assistant Editor of Transactions) and presentations were given on:

The History of Nature Conservation in Breckland
The Conservation interest of Breckland
and Managing Breckland for Wildlife.

Lord Cranbrook gave the summing up and made the formal launch of the document. In his remarks he took the opportunity of wishing Mike Schofield good luck in his retirement at the end of March; sentiments I was later able to informally endorse on behalf of the Society.

Don Dorling
March 1993

KNOWING YOUR OWN PATCH

The importance of knowing your own patch cannot be over emphasised, especially for those living in the country, where they may have a diversity of habitats. We have lived in this small section of the Tud valley for just on 20 years, and new things turn up even now, at quite frequent intervals. Not just birds and plants. Each year adds to the number of species of moths we have recorded, now somewhere in the region of 250 species. Anything we can't identify, or are not quite sure of, goes to an expert. For instance, last autumn a little group of an obvious *Amanita* species appeared under a tree on a grassy bank. Like the Blusher (*A. rubescens*) in general appearance, it was different in that the scales on the cap and stem, and the bulb at the base were all tinged with bright yellow. The books suggested that this was *Amanita franchetti* and described it as 'rare' so we took it to Reg Evans who confirmed that it was, though he called it *A. aspera*, which is the same thing, only from a different book! He also said that it was the first record he had for the species. This year, we have already had a "second record" – growing attached to the abundant moss on a shady part of the lawn. This is a delicate little 'bracket' type fungus called *Leptoglossum retigerum*. The first record for this also rare – or overlooked species was also on 'our patch' about five years ago, and about a hundred yards away. A look amongst the moss on your lawn in late winter might add to Reg's store of records!

Alec Bull.

ARE THERE ANY BRYOLOGISTS OUT THERE?

Traditionally, Floras of Norfolk have always contained an account of the Mosses and Liverworts. I understand that Robin Stevenson, our Bryological recorder, is considering the possibility of mapping our Norfolk species for the proposed tetrad flora of the county, though this would have to be on the basis of the 10km square, due to the impossibility of tetrad mapping with only a small handful of possible recorders. Living in the far west of the county, Robin particularly needs knowledgeable helpers in East Norfolk. For instance, he was delighted when I was able to send a list included with ordinary plant records from Gary Kennison made on Broad Fen Dilham which included a new 10km record for the rare *Cinclidium stygium* as well as a number of other species peculiar to that particular type of habitat. Anyone interested in doing Mosses in East Norfolk can

either let me know, or get in touch with Robin direct. Address on the back of the programme.

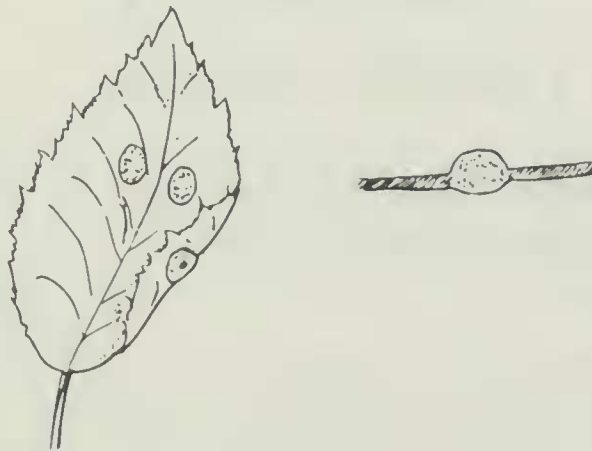
Alec Bull.

BRITISH MUSEUM
12 MAY 1993
EXCHANGE
SERIALS UNIT

BIRCH LEAF BLOTCHES

Referring to my note on the Birch leaf gall in the last issue, it has been pointed out to me quite correctly that the illustration accompanying this could be mistaken for another feature on Birch which is not a gall. In order not to confuse I think a description of both will help to differentiate.

The galls caused by the larvae of the midge *Anisostephus betulinum* Kieffer, as found by me, appear as near spherical blisters on leaf approx. 2.5mms. in diameter, being yellowish in the early stages but later becoming dark purplish. In this stage a neat circular hole can be found underneath where the yellow larvae have left to pupate in the soil.



The larvae of a micromoth, The Large Birch Pigmy, *Ecoedemia argentipedella* Zell, also causes the leaves of Birch to become blotched with dark circular spots approx. 2.5mms. in diameter. These blotches are never spherical but are nearly flat. As the larvae are leaf-miners they eventually eat outwards from the spot and the leaf takes on a reticulated appearance minutely dotted with the frass of the green larvae. These are fairly common where Birch is numerous.



Ken Durrant.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Members who pay by cash or cheque are reminded that subscriptions for 1993/94 became due on 1st April 1993.

Current rates are:- Ordinary £8. Family £10. Please forward your payment to:

Mr. D.I. Richmond, Hon Treasurer (N&NNS), 42 Richmond Road, Reepham, Norwich. NR10 4LS.

I was surprised at the number of telephone calls I received offering me the book as requested in the last issue of Natterjack (No 40). Many thanks. Yours Sincerely Arthur Johnson.

FUNGUS FORAYS

The increase in attendance at our meetings is remarkable. In 1991 at Santon Downham about 102 arrived – fortunately more or less divided into morning and afternoon groups.

We were expecting a similar number at the same site in 1992 but were surprised when a total of 260 were present. These numbers were taken by the Forest Ranger – a small fee was payable.

Nevertheless it was a great success. The small room provided for a talk was filled to capacity by people anxious to know more about fungi.

It is expected that numbers may have to be restricted this year when we organise a similar event.

Reg & Lil Evans.

DISCIOTA VENOSA

In one of the Norfolk Naturalists Trust woods we found this large cup shaped fungus which belongs to the morel family.

About 20 cms in diameter, it has a fawn to brownish colour often with a reddish tinge. The undersurface is whitish, the inner surface characteristically veined. The flesh smells of bleach. It occurs in April or May and is new to our records.



Reg & Lil Evans.

Records of Morels and others of this group of early (April - May) fungi would be appreciated.

FUNGI - A NEW RECORD

Over the last few years there appears to be an increasing interest in fungi. In 1991 a Forestry Commission foray had an unexpected attendance of 112. Last year we had a similar meeting at the same site and over 250 arrived. It is possible that the number may have to be restricted this year.

During September last year a number of small (1-2 cms) fungi were found on a rotting carpet on a compost heap. There were over 60 of these small shell shaped growths with short excentric stalks and brown gills. They proved to be a new addition to our Norfolk records, and were found to be *Melanotus textilis*.

This fungus we have not seen before and is an example of how certain species can colonise habitats that may seem, at first, unsuitable.

Reg & Lil Evans.

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

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

While walking over Beeston Common on April 8th. 1993, Cherry called my attention to a dead shrew. On seeing the shrew it was immediately clear that it was of a large size and black in colour except for its underparts which were white. A check of its hind legs revealed a fringe of bristly hairs and confirmed our first siting of a water shrew (*Neomys fodiens*), albeit dead. The shrew was found in grassland and although not far from a small boggy area, the nearest permanent water (i.e. a stream) was approximately 300 metres away. There appeared to be no marks on the body therefore it is unlikely to have been brought to the spot by a predator. Like many small mammals they are probably less scarce than thought owing to the fact that most sitings are due to a chance encounter or in this case a shrewed observation!

Francis and Cherry Farrow.

A FLY BY NIGHT

Pond dipping is a child's delight and a pastime I still love to do. On March 14th. 1993, I collected some water from a stream on Beeston Common and discovered a number of "creepers" - stonefly nymphs. With my limited references I managed to key the nymph to the family Nemouridae but could go no further. The following day I noted that one of the larger nymphs had crawled out of the water and remained stationary for most of the day. On looking in the container the next day, having previously covered it with a net, I discovered that overnight the nymph had become an adult stonefly. I took the stonefly and the exuviae (nymphal skin) to Ken Durrant for further identification. A couple of days later Ken was able to tell me that the stonefly was *Nemourella inconspicua** and that he had caught one on the Common, almost 20 years ago, in 1974. It is heartening to know that throughout the years of intermittent contamination of the waterways, drought and other disturbances of the environment the species survives. A second stonefly failed to hatch correctly and drowned, in the wild such mortality must also be great.

*According to the Key to the Adults and Nymphs of British Stoneflies (Pecoptera) by HBN Hynes, FBA (1977) *N. Inconspicua* (Pict.) is renamed as *N. picteti* Klapálek.

Francis Farrow.

BIRDWATCHING – SNETTISHAM SUNDAY 14th FEBRUARY

Murky, misty weather prevailed over the weekend of 13th & 14th February. This was reflected in an attendance of only 11 for the birdwatching walk on Sunday 14th February at Snettisham R.S.P.B. reserve. In the car park we saw perched on nearby posts, a Blackheaded Gull and a Common Gull which enabled us to make a good comparison on the difference between the two species.

In spite of the mist there was more than reasonable visibility also surprisingly quite a breeze which made us feel somewhat chilly.

There were many thousands of birds in the area, notably Knot, Lapwing and Pinkfeet. I think my surprise of the day was seeing three Avocets amongst the many waders in the Wash.

We were ready for our packed lunches when we arrived at the first hide along the beach. It was there that we thought we had identified a female Scaup, but the final decision was a female Goldeneye. As we proceeded round the reserve we could see many birds, including two Mute

Swans with a last year's cygnet. We were lucky to spot two Hares. As we neared the end of our 4¼ hours birdwatching we wondered if we might make the forty species for the walk. Three common species finally took us to forty-one, Starling, Goldfinch and Blackbird. The "surprise miss" was Red Breasted Merganser.

Our thanks to Mike Poulton for leading the trip. I'm sure that we all thoroughly enjoyed it, I certainly did. About seven miles inland on the way home I was somewhat surprised to see a solitary Oystercatcher feeding on grass at the side of the road. A good way to finish an excellent day.

Species seen:- Common Gull, Black Headed Gull, Kestrel, Skylark, Shelduck, Little Grebe, Pochard, Goldeneye, Tufted Duck, Mallard, Turnstone, Knot, Ringed Plover, Redshank, Sanderling, Pink Foot, Greylag, Grey Plover, Dunlin, Bar Tailed Godwit, Carrion Crow, Canada Goose, Coot, Avocet, Teal, Curlew, Black Tailed Godwit, Cormorant, Lapwing, Gadwall, Golden Plover, Shoveler, Mute Swan, White Front, Wigeon, Moorhen, Pheasant, Starling, Goldfinch, Blackbird, Oystercatcher and two Hares.

John Butcher

On 11th March I walked the Pingo Trail. Within ½ mile of the Stow Bedon car park I saw 6 muntjac. These small deer are increasing in numbers, and as I began to ponder about this my thoughts turned to the Bullfinch population. Since 1st October 92 I have seen only 1 male and no female Bullfinch. I regularly walk around and about Thetford Forest, Wretham Heath, Peddar's Way and the Norfolk Coastal Footpath. The only sighting was here in Watton, in my own garden.

My walk on 12th March was from Langmere to Foulmere and the Devil's Punchbowl. Just after noon on my return via Ringmere it was bright and warm. I saw 5 faded Pecoek *Inachis io*, 3 bright yellow Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*, 3 Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae* and one glorious Painted Lady *Cynthia cardui*. I was both thrilled and surprised. I watched it for over 5 minutes as it "played" around the verge of the forest ride before it flew up and away over the pine trees. It was in mint condition.

So, 2 walks produced 2 queries. Have other members seen a Painted Lady this March, and have I been unlucky not to see Bullfinches or are they decreasing?

Susan Pallister.

Michael Seago, Editor of the Norfolk Bird Report agrees that Bullfinch numbers have declined. Parties of up to half a dozen which regularly visited his garden at Thorpe have long since gone. Michael continues as follows: However, on rare occasions the picture becomes very different. One such instance began during the autumn of 1961 when considerable numbers were reported in both Suffolk and Norfolk. In the former county flocks of a hundred or more were on record. At Minsmere cliffs coasting movements were particularly evident on October 21st when 50 travelled south following by over 200 bullfinches there on January 1st 1962. In addition at this time bullfinches were to be found feeding on the beaches at Dunwich and Walberswick, whilst a flock of 45 became established on Salthouse Heath.

It is interesting to note that bullfinches are included in the quarry of sparrowhawks and hobbies - both birds of prey increasing in numbers. Hen harriers, too, take bullfinches and their remains appear from time to time in winter in harrier pellets. A combination of these activities and a large-scale reduction in the acreage of orchards has doubtless had an effect on bullfinch numbers.

Michael J. Seago.