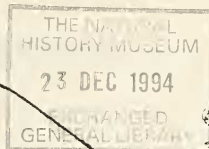




Number 47

THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK



November 1994

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that a **Special General Meeting** of the Society will be held at Chantry Hall, Norwich on Wednesday 22nd February, 1995 at 7.30pm to consider, and if thought fit to adopt, the following resolution:

That in accordance with paragraph 6 of the Laws of the Society, the following rates of subscription shall apply to all subscriptions becoming due on or after 1st April, 1995.

Member Class	Annual Subscription
Ordinary	£10
Family	£10
Junior	£3
Affiliation	£15

The purpose of these changes is to harmonise the subscriptions paid by individual and family members as costs to the Society are the same for both categories of membership.

Each household having ordinary or family membership of the Society will continue to receive one copy of Transactions, one copy of the Bird & Mammal Report, and four editions of Natterjack each year. All members are entitled to attend lectures and field meetings to which they are cordially invited to bring along friends or relatives with an interest in natural history.

R. Hancy, Chairman.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Notes are given below of a few of the forthcoming meetings. For full details, please refer to the programme card.

Thursday 19th January John Bingham, formerly leader of the Wheat Breeding Group at Plant Breeding International, Cambridge, will trace the origins of modern wheat. 19.30 hrs Central Hall, Wymondham.

Wednesday 22nd February Don Berwick talks about the origins of some of our garden flowers. 19.30 hrs, Chantry Hall, Norwich.

Sunday 26th February Field meeting to Morston Quay for birds. Meet at 11.00 hrs, NT car park (TG 007443). Leader David Paull.

Please send items for Natterjack to Colin Dack 12, Shipdham Rd, Toftwood, Dereham Norfolk NR19 1JJ

NORFOLK BIRD AND MAMMAL REPORT

1993 Edition

Readers of the 1993 Report may have noticed that a number of typographical errors had crept into the text, virtually all of which were the responsibility of the printers. Enclosed with this issue of Natterjack is an amendment slip prepared by the printers. Your attention is drawn particularly to the table concerning the breeding success of Montagu's Harriers in the County which should be amended in as many copies as possible to avoid incorrect statistics being used in future research.

Future arrangements

In recent years it has become the practice for County Bird Reports to carry an increasing amount of detail annually in the classified list of species which forms the backbone of the report. You will have noticed from the 1993 edition of our County Report that the amount of space allocated to the species list has almost trebled over the last three issues in an attempt to meet criticism that Norfolk was not doing enough to record the more common species.

This increase in material collated and published has put a substantial burden on the group of people who prepare this section. At the same time the Norfolk Bird Club has been duplicating some of this effort in the work it does in publishing the species list in its excellent two monthly bulletin. It has been decided that from the 1994 Report onwards the Norfolk Bird Club will take over the responsibility for the preparation of the annual Classified List of species appearing in the Bird Report.

As a consequence of this the procedures for submitting records are being amended. In future all reports from observers should be sent to the Norfolk Bird Club at:

The Old Bakery, High Street, Docking, KING'S LYNN, Norfolk. PE31 8NH.

To spread the workload more evenly throughout the year and also to allow interesting records to appear in the regular Bird Club bulletins, observers are asked to submit their records on a MONTHLY BASIS WITH IMMEDIATE EFFECT, PLEASE.

PINK DOLPHINS?

As part of the large gas offshore pipeline project from Hainan Island, S.W. China to Black Point, Hong Kong New Territories (over 500 miles) there is a substantial amount of dredging being carried out across important shipping channels, especially in the Pearl River Estuary. Due to the nature of the dredging works on-going environmental monitoring is essential. Such monitoring is mainly to limit the amount of siltation in the water column, but other factors such as potential heavy metal contamination and water quality are also noted.

The main area of the works is north of Lantau Island (site of the new Hong Kong Airport) and around Black Point. This area is also "home" to an unusual mammal, the Chinese White Dolphin (*Sousa chinensis*). This dolphin is an estuarine species and in the Pearl River Delta mainly confined to this area. All project vessels have been asked to look out for the species and to report its presence when encountered. Over the past month (September) I have been lucky enough to see the Dolphins on a number of occasions. They are relatively small, usually less than 2 metres and are white tinged with pink, especially the dorsal fin. Although usually seen singly I have on one occasion seen 3 together. Most sightings are, however, distant and of a short duration, therefore no chance of a quick snap, as yet...

Francis Farrow.

THOMPSON COMMON - "EDIBLE FROGS"

These frogs have been present at Thompson for a long time but have recently become much rarer and I am concerned about their status. Whilst usually referred to as "Edible Frogs", they are in fact Pool Frogs and an unusual member of our fauna. Readers might be able to help in one of two ways. Firstly please send me details of your last observation of these frogs. Secondly, let me know of any specimens held in captivity so that a breeding colony might be formed in case the worst comes to the worst for the wild population.

John Buckley 77, Janson Road, Shirley, Southampton. SO15 5GL Tel: 0703 782966

Diatoms in Doctor's Cut.

In a Norfolk which is undergoing continual change it is nice to find something which has remained the same.

Our host, Richard Gurney, lead us across his estate to a little bridge over the Doctor's Cut. On the surface of the water I was delighted to see lumps of brown scum. To others these brown lumps, about six inches across, floating on the water, might have looked a little repulsive but I had already seen them twenty five years before and I knew that, under the microscope they would reveal a world of indescribable beauty.

My notebook for 1 June 1969 says " A chocolate-brown scum was flowing out of the Doctor's Cut under the bridge, towards the Bure. It could be seen everywhere on the Cut and in places covered perhaps 30% of the surface. On examination it proved to contain only diatoms. Basically it was a network of filaments of *Melosira varians* and *Fragilaria* sp. Attached to these were *Amphora ovalis* var *pediculus* and *Synedra radians*. A number of small *Naviculoid* diatoms were present among the filaments as was *Achnanthes lanceolata*. Two of the *Melosira* filaments had auxospores. A feature of the material was the presence of pine pollen."

The material which I collected on our visit on 12 June 1994, 25 years later, was substantially the same. Because we were a fortnight later in the year, there was no pine pollen.

It is delightful to find that the assemblage of diatoms has remained the same over a quarter of a century. Only, sadly, the names of many of the diatoms on the species list have been altered in the burst of taxonomic activity which has accompanied the development during the last 25 years of the Scanning Electron Microscope.

The Horstead Chalk Quarries

In "The Geology of the Country around Norwich" (1881). Horace Woodward (an honorary member of the Society) said " In the parish of Horstead, where the chalk rises from a few feet to 25 feet above the level of the river Bure, pits which have been opened by the riverside have been extended into the hills, in one locality for more than half a mile. As the chalk was worked away, so a channel was made to allow the water to flow up to the portion of the pit worked, for the convenience of the wherries. These old workings are all deserted now and as the slopes have been planted with fir and larch, they present a very picturesque appearance, and the one mentioned by Lyell is generally known as Little Switzerland."

Lyell in his Elements of Geology said, "I visited in 1825 an extensive range of quarries then open on the river Bure near Horstead, about six miles from Norwich, which afforded a continuous section, a quarter of a mile in length of white chalk, exposed to a depth of 26 feet and covered by a thick bed of gravel." A view of the Chalk Pit at Horstead, made by Mrs Gunn on 1.Sep. 1838 was published in Lyell's book. (Her husband was a founder member of the Society). In 1878 the pit was closed.

Keith Clarke.

SUMMER CHAFFER

I live in the centre of Norwich - a stones throw from the river - and at 9-30 pm on 9th July standing at an upstairs window I noticed a swarm of insects circling round a Balsalm Poplar tree. The lowest part of the swarm was about 20ft. from the ground and I estimate there were 20-30 insects about the tree at any one time. Through binoculars it looked as if they were beetles not moths and I resolved to catch one.

I lashed a butterfly net to two lengths of dowelling, but realised that standing on the ground I was still too low. However, by mounting a step ladder - steadied as usual by my wife - I managed to sweep the net through the region occupied by some of the insects. By luck, and I maintain, an element of judgement, I managed to catch one, but not before I had attracted the attention of one or two Norwich revellers. Fortunately they chose not to join in the chase as their steps were not too steady.

The insect proved to be a Summer Chaffer, *Amphimallon solstitialis*, which like its near relative the Cockchaffer is well known for its congregations on summer evenings. The notable Norfolk naturalist William Arderon F.R.S. (1703-1767) recorded in his diary how destructive the latter insect was in Norfolk and Suffolk in his time; on one occasion a farmer collected 80 bushels of the larvae. Arderon also noted that the grubs "are often discovered by hogs who, I am informed, are greedy of them at first but having filled their bellies full, never care for them after."

The swarm I noted was very small by comparison with 18th century Norfolk, but in the centre of the city with Great Crested Grebes fishing the river, and a pair of swans hatching out 4 cygnets nearby, one can still call Norwich a green city.

Malcom Thain

EXPLORING THE ARCHIVES

The regular series of reports highlighting some aspects of the first 125 years of our Society published on Saturdays in *The Eastern Daily Press* has made its contributors pore through back numbers of *The Transactions* to find suitable stories. Had the opportunity not been given us to write the series I doubt if we would have perused those pages with quite the same persistence. Consequently we would have been denied the pleasure of travelling back in time to sit in at meeting held a century or more ago and receive reports on such a wide ranging basis.

The "Norfolk and Norwich" of our title denoted merely the home base of the membership. Their interest was country, indeed world wide. Lengthy articles describe the flora and fauna of remote parts of these islands, bringing the benefits of an individuals travels to the membership as a whole. Perhaps the modern equivalent would be a descriptive television film or a slide show during our winter indoor programme.

Emphasis now is essentially on the area included in our title. In fact, the much enlarged *Transactions* which include the *Bird and Mammal Report* are hard put to it to include all the excellent material offered. Not that we can afford to ignore what is happening in other parts of the globe or this country. Recent news items demonstrate quite clearly that the recent influx of exciting bird life is a desperate search for food on its part. The installation of the air monitoring station on our North Norfolk coast has given convincing proof that an invisible barrier to external influences does not surround our mapped boundary.

In parallel with the wide ranging view, much detailed work on our local flora and fauna was going on last century. One example is the remarkable achievement of F. Kitton in producing his list of diatoms. His work was so thorough it has stood the test of over a hundred years. Now we must look again says our present day expert, Keith Clarke, and provide an up-to-date check list to pass on to the next century.

The importance of field work is being clearly understood by members. The recent meeting where we had the opportunity to learn about mosses and lichens was very well attended and our referees Robin Stevenson and Peter Lambley were kept very busy answering our questions. That is how it should be and points us towards a healthy future.

Rex Hancy

TRIPLE TREAT

The last page of the previous issue of *Natterjack* coincidentally featured three of my favourite topics. Congratulations to the editor are surely in order!

Brian Laurence contributed a note on the *Pholcus phalangioides* spider that had been seen in his house for the first time. This species is clearly becoming quite widespread in Norfolk. I now have records from the southern boundary to a considerable stretch of the north coast. Brian mentions the *Tegenarias* in the house. These long-legged "monsters" are much larger and weightier than the fragile looking *Pholcus*. Don't be misled. Garth Coupland and I have both photographed grey wispy looking *Pholcus* neatly wrapping *Tegenarias* for future consumption. One member has described them as the most effective insecticide ever!

Reg and Lil Evans continue to find new galls for our Norfolk list but poor Suzanne Williams has discovered the main problem of the would-be mammal watcher - most mammals are far too secretive to give themselves away. Looking under anything that could provide cover is always worthwhile. Straw bales used to be so productive. That was before the days when the countryside was covered with unwieldy giant round bales. Pieces of old corrugated iron left in field corners sometimes hide a vole or two. Some give vocal clues. Argumentative shrews and chattering family parties of stoats are not always found but their presence can be noted. One rule is certain. You see more when you are not actually looking. See Eddie Boosey's article, *Serendipitous sightings* in the Mammal Report for 1991

Rex Hancy

ARACHNOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS part one

The Policeman's torch dazzled me as he demanded to know what I was doing lurking behind the ladies toilets at Acle Bridge.

"Looking at *Larinioides sclopetarius*" I answered.

The Policeman then recognised me. I am a colleague of his and soon he and the reporter of "the pervert" were engrossed in watching a huge female spider feeding on a cranefly.

Larinioides sclopetarius (Clerk, 1757) is quite unmistakable being unvarying in pattern in both sexes, although pale and dark individuals are occasionally encountered.

Every book I have read states that this magnificent orb-weaver is uncommon and only occurs on buildings near water, I have found it to be incredibly numerous around the Broads area but always on buildings, bridges and boats of every size and description. The furthest from water that I have found it is fifty yards, under the light illuminating the Maltsters pub sign at Ranworth.

I wondered for several years where this spider spun its web before man arrived. Whilst canoeing on Rockland Broad I found the answer. Dead tree-trunks and branches that projected from the water itself were festooned with its webs. I have never found it on vegetation or bank-side trees. Why?

This is one of the billions of unanswered questions asked by students of the Natural World. It seems to me that as we answer one question the answer creates another. Thank goodness for that.

I should hate to know everything?

Garth Coupland

ARACHNOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS part two

It circled its victim with a confidence and skill that was reminiscent of a malevolent bare-knuckle pugilist whose aim was to utterly destroy his opponent with no injury to himself. Those slow, deliberate, circling steps were mesmerising to observe. The quick retreats to avoid injury from the flailing limbs of its prey did not prevent the final outcome.

I was watching an adult, female "Spitting Spider" *Scytodes thoracica*, immobilising a house fly almost as large as itself. She had approached it then, with a slight jerk of her cephalothorax spat a charge of venomous gum from a distance of half an inch which glued one of the fly's legs instantly to the floor. This was when the circling began. The fly was subjected to three more like attacks over a period of about five minutes which eventually subdued it. During this time the spider's front legs waved menacingly before it, I believe testing the intensity of its victims will to live. When the fly's struggles were no longer a danger to the spider's delicate legs she walked up to it and delivered the coup de grace; one fatal stabbing bite with her hypodermic fangs.

This method of capturing prey is unique to the Scytodidae, a family of spiders with this one representative in Britain. However, I did observe it many times chasing and biting to death Silverfish heavier than itself sometimes almost cutting the insects in half. Its slow, creeping locomotion suddenly changed to the dash and pounce of a leopard which its colouration reminds one of. *Scytodes* is a beautiful spider. A ground colour of opaque yellow, ivory overlain with jet black spots and lines, impossible to mistake for any other species, Although captured *Scytodes* fed in daylight, it would appear to only venture abroad at night. To my knowledge in the four months I kept her she never drank.

I kept her in a two and half inch diameter clear plastic pot with a small triangle of folded card as a retreat. She laid two batches of pink eggs one month apart. The first batch of eggs was left attached to the retreat, the second she held as she hung upside-down in the retreat on her "chest".

I found several more adults in my house during the summer of 1993 and in early 1994 started to find tiny young in the bath! Clearly we were proud guardians of a breeding colony. We continue to find *Scytodes* to this day.

I am led to believe that this is the only colony apart from one in the Castle Museum recorded in the County. How they got there I have no idea. The species has a distinctly southern distribution. Perhaps, like that other southern spider *Pholcus phalangoides*, this species is on the move northwards assisted by man and his central heating systems?

Garth Coupland

THE DADDY-LONG LEGS SPIDER

Referring to the note regarding the above spider *Pholcus phalangioides* in the last issue of Natterjack. This spider is probably more frequent in Norfolk than is generally thought. As I write this I am looking at one which has been residing under the picture rail in my living room since last week, I certainly find them at odd times about the house.

If disturbed they have a habit of vibrating their bodies on their long legs similar to species of short-palped crane flies, and in so doing tend to become invisible. I have found them in many places in the county always inside buildings. I first found them fairly common in the water-mill on the North Elmham to Billingford road just after the last war.

A few years ago I kept one female for nearly three years in a caterpillar breeding cage, she was fed fortnightly with a gnat or small moth and would also take a drink from a piece of wet blotting-paper which I inserted in her cage.

PS

Since writing the above I gave a talk at Hoveton Village Hall on the 14th November and noted seven *Pholcus phalangioides* in the foyer, two in the gents, and three in the hall, there must be quite a colony existing there. Being more noticeable in the evening when they are mobile in search of a meal, their webs are extremely fine almost impossible to see.

Ken Durrant

AN ABUNDANCE OF LARGE APHIDS

During mid August my friend David Fagg informed me that there were a large number of wasps crawling over the ground in his garden. I inquired if he had disturbed a wasps nest whilst gardening, he replied that they were all under a willow tree.

Suspecting that aphids and honeydew was the attraction I visited him at Strumpshaw the following day. At the top of his garden under a willow covering an area of four square feet there were literally scores of wasps on the ground and also on the lower leaves of the tree.

Looking under the tree I could see most of the branches with their undersides covered with thick dark masses of thousands of very large *Apterous viviparous* female aphids, honeydew was continually dripping from them. Individually they are a very pretty insect being nearly 5mm. in length, the abdomen is covered in a pile of thick grey hairs resembling felt with a rows of black spots and a large black conical tubercle in the lower centre. There is also a large cone shaped cornicle on either side which produces the honeydew.

I took some samples for identification staining my fingers a burgundy red colour with the body fluids of the squashed examples, and managed to key them down to the family *Lachnidae*. As there are no modern published keys to take them further to the specie I rang up Tony Irwin at the Museum. With his help and two old publications of 1881 and 1929 I finally tracked them down as the Large Willow Aphid *Tuberochneus salignus*. During its history it has been known under many different synonymous names.

According to the old literature the appearance of the specie is spasmodic, abundant one year then not seen for a decade or so.

The wasps were of three species, the Common wasp *Vespa vulgaris*, German wasp *V. germanicus* and the Hornet *Vespa crabro* all busy taking up the manna from above.

Ken Durrant

