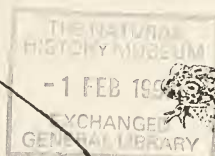




Number 50

THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK



August 1995

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

SENNOWE PARK 14th May 1995

Considering the weather prior to this field meeting we were very lucky that it changed in time to give us a very enjoyable day. Thirty members assembled and we were met by Mr. Cook's head keeper Simon Featherstone who took us around the estate.

The tour involved circling both lakes, one before lunch and the other after. The first lake contained a number of sandy islands seen to advantage from the old railway embankment, here the birders enjoyed the many waterfowl present. Canada, Egyptian and Greylag Geese, Shelduck, Mallard, Tufted, Gadwell, and Pochard Ducks, Cormorant, Coot, Moorhen, Heron, Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Common Sandpiper and Kingfisher.

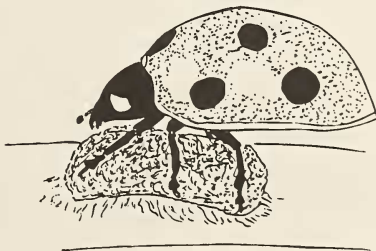
On the second lake we were given a fine example of aggressive display by a cob Mute Swan who was guarding his mate on a nest when two other swans swam close by. He chased them away swimming with long energetic strokes with his legs, his head back and almost hidden in his puffed out plumage making himself look twice his size. Satisfied, he then flew back on whistling wings again to his post. Many other Geese and Duck also had young on this lake.

Ten species of butterfly were seen, Small and Green-veined White, Brimstone, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Green Hairstreak and Brown Argus. Moths however were few and far between. Treble Bar, Cinnabar and the dark green micro with the long antennae *Adela reaumurella* were the only examples seen. Caterpillars of the Yellow-tail moth were often found on the hawthorns.

Six species of Ladybirds, Cream spot, 14 spot, 22 spot, 10 spot and the very common 7 spot a number of which were covering the cocoons of their parasitic Braconid wasp *Perilitus coccinellae*. Beautiful red Cardinal beetles were very noticeable on the wayside herbage, whilst a bracket fungus *Pseudotrametes gibbosa* on a Beech stump produced examples of the common fungi beetle *Cis boleti*.

Of interest amongst the flies were the furry Primrose Sprites *Bombylius major* hovering over flowers on the railway embankment, the black and white hoverfly *Leucozonina lucorum* and the coppery *Ferdinandea cuprea* who were visiting the hawthorn blossoms.

The Large hunter spiders *Pisaura mirabilis* were common, sunning themselves on the river and lakeside vegetation, often in close proximity to large red and black froghoppers *Cercopis vulnerata*. Another spider the long bodied *Tetragnathus extensa* was also found laying prone on the leaves of the rushes near the water. Its much darker relative *T. montana* could be found in the shady areas of the woodland walks.



Ladybird camouflaging the cocoon of its parasitic Braconid wasp.

Nearly one hundred plants were recorded during the day and we were rewarded by the magnificent sight of some

twenty square yards of Pink Purslane *Montia sibirica* in a glade just as we returned to our cars. A full list of the flora and fauna has been sent to Mr. Cook with our thanks.

Ken Durrant.

NOTES FROM GT. YARMOUTH

Gt. Yarmouth being as it is, one of the most easterly points of the British Isles, is greatly advantaged by its geographical position in attracting visitations of migrant birds.

In many cases the Yarmouth foreshore is the first land to be encountered by many birds on their migration routes from foreign shores, acting as a resting place before continuing their wondrous journeys. Of course many birds reach Yarmouth and travel no further. Breydon water is a very important estuary in this respect and annually, attracts both nationally and internationally important numbers of both wildfowl and wading birds. This estuary is therefore an excellent venue for ornithologists and is recorded on an almost daily basis.

The Gt. Yarmouth cemetery and St. Nicholas' church graveyard also provide an ideal resting place for birds and are likewise extremely popular with the bird watching fraternity.

There are a number of other equally interesting places both in and around Yarmouth suitable for watching birds and indeed all other aspects of nature.

On the evening of 5th July last year, the Gt. Yarmouth Naturalists' Society organised an evening walk near Fritton to the South of Yarmouth. At dusk, four hobbies were observed in a field all hawking for the many summer chafers that were on the wing, quite a spectacle for the members. Those birds were seen in the same spot for two or three days after.

At the beginning of the year, almost forty thousand lapwings could be seen daily on and around Breydon and what a wonderful sight they presented when they rose up in large numbers and took to the wing.

On the 11th May, fourteen black terns were also seen on Breydon collecting insects while on the wing. The Little tern colony on the Yarmouth north beach under the protection of the RSPB has of course been well recorded in the local press.

One or two rare birds have recently been seen in the cemetery, such as the Red flanked bluetail in October and more recently the Hume's Yellow browed warbler.

We have many sites of particular importance to those whose interests lie in the various fields of entomology. On 14th June one of our members gave me a couple of cocoons asking if I could identify them. They had been found with several more in the sandy walls of a gravel pit in Burgh Castle. Unfortunately, I could not identify them at first. A couple were sent to Ken Durrant also with no identification. I suggested that I keep them to see what developed. I kept them at home in suitable conditions and on the 19th June they both emerged. They were bee killer wasps *Philanthus tringulum* both males. This was my first encounter with the cocoons of this species, I had of course come across the wasps before. They have a fascinating life history.

On 7th August I found a single Brown Argus butterfly among Common Blues on the Lound waterworks reserve and hunt as I may, I could find no more. On 14th August, one of our members John Burton rang me to say that he had found one on Belton Common. He returned the following day and discovered that there were good numbers forming two distinct small colonies. This was duly reported to the Castle Museum and has been recorded as a new site for the species.

Toward the end of August we had an inundation of Silver Y moths and on the Lound reserve on 21st August, there were hundreds of thousands to be seen as one walked through the long vegetation putting them to flight. This seemed to me to be somewhat surprising when compared with the very low numbers of moths recorded during the year.

With regard to the department of mycology, it seems to me that many species of fungi were seen on much earlier dates this year than usual, certainly my own records would indicate this to be the case. In the areas where I usually hunt for fungi, it appears to have been an excellent season for many species. I certainly recorded one or two species that I have not encountered before in my area.

The Gt. Yarmouth Naturalists Society now produce an Annual Report, and I am fortunate enough to be the editor. During the course of the year, we urge our members to jot down their observations into a notebook kept handy at our meetings for this purpose. Some of the members are very enthusiastic in recording but sadly many are not. All of the records from this notebook are incorporated into the systematic observations section of our Annual Report in order that as complete a list as possible is forthcoming from Gt. Yarmouth.

Of course it is essential that records are kept in order to provide as complete a picture of our wildlife as possible, but many seem reluctant to do so, however, we must endeavour to encourage them as much as possible.

Tony Brown.

The Editor of the Transactions has passed this item to the editor of Natterjack as there was not room in Transactions.

FIELD MEETING TO BARNEY WOOD 18th JUNE 1995

15 members attended this first visit by the Society to Barney Wood. Barney Wood is a National Nature Reserve leased by English Nature from the Astley Estate and forms part of Swanton Novers NNR.

It is a rather unusual wood in a Norfolk context with a stream flowing through it from east to west. The woodland is a mix of oak - ash woodland with alder and bird cherry in the wetter areas. In the eastern part there is some rather drier ground with oak pasture woodland.

Notable flowering plants found included *Aconitum napellus* - probably an escape from a garden, large populations of Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage, *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, Climbing Corydalis, *Corydalis claviculata*, Giant Horsetail, *Equisetum telmateia*, Yellow Archangel, *Lamium galeobdolon*, Soft Shield Fern, *Polystichum setiferum* and Small-leaved Lime, *Tilia cordata*. A visit a few weeks later by Alec Bull and myself yielded 18 species of bramble, the highest recorded for West Norfolk, this included at least one new county record and several vice-county records.

Lists of fungi and galls were made by Reg and Lil Evans. The lichens were also of interest with the apple-green *Parmelia caperata* growing on oak and rowan indicating the comparatively clean air. Records of invertebrates were made by Paul Cobb and others.

A specially pleasing aspect of the meeting was the adventurous spirit and the considerable knowledge shown by many of the members. It gave a strong feeling of an active group contributing to a better understanding of the fauna and flora of the county. I for one will make sure that the site manager for these woods does not spray and clear the brambles! Copies of all the records made have been added to the English Nature files for Swanton Novers NNR. Finally if any one wishes to visit the wood or others in the complex of ancient wood for serious study and recording please contact me at 60 Bracondale, Norwich.

Peter Lambley.

BIRD AND MAMMAL REPORT 1994

It is with regret that the Editors report that the 1994 edition of the annual Bird and Mammal Report will be published somewhat later than usual. Changes in reporting and recording procedures, together with the introduction of a new Printer, have resulted in delays in its preparation.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS BUT NOT TELEPHONE NUMBER.

Mr. M. Poulton (Research Committee Chairman) Address is 32 St. Leonards' Close, Wymondham. NR18 0JF Telephone: 01953 603700 The information in the Programme is wrong.

WATER STICK INSECTS

It is difficult to find larger fungi during the dry spell and only one toadstool (the Blusher) *Amanita rubescens* was recorded. Many of the smaller fungi live in damp conditions such as on the debris at the edge of pools. Whilst searching for these a dead piece of reed was found bearing small white hairs which on closer examination were in pairs each above and attached to a single egg. These proved to be the eggs of *Ranatra linearis* the water Stick Insect which has a rounded body unlike its relative the water scorpion. It also seems to be much rarer.

Reg Evans

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

FOR SALE

Canon F1n with 50MM f1.8 lens (like new) takes Canon FD lens.
Hoya 28mm f2.8. Tubes, medium size holdall all leather, lens reversing ring.
If interested please contact Miss D. Maxey. Tel: 01362 820704.
This is an expensive camera, intended to withstand rugged use. A camera you can leave in your will.
If you wish to know anything about this camera contact Colin Dack, (Tel: 01362 696314) who uses Canon F1's, and thinks they are the best camera ever made.

SOLOMON'S SEAL SAWFLIES (Phymatocera aterrima)

There are two patches of Solomon's Seal in my garden and recently it seemed, from a distance that one group occupying a square metre had completely died out. An inspection proved that only skeletonised leaves remained and the larvae responsible had gone into pupation. These were the Solomon's Seal Sawfly larvae - pale bluish grey with black heads and about 20mm long. They overwinter in the soil. A few have been retained to see if they have parasites to provide a check to their activity.

Reg Evans.

WOAD

If any member would like to grow this interesting plant, Seeds are available (S.A.E. please).
Reg Evane, "Chanterelle", Church Road, Welborne, E. Dereham, Norfolk. NR20 3LH

ADULT EDUCATION

I recently attended an Adult education week-end at How Hill, and as anticipated had a thoroughly enjoyable time with 22 complete strangers having a common interest.

The diversity of wild life there is great. We were invited to do log turning to see what was underneath and pond dipping. It is a long time since I did anything like that.

The highlight of the week-end was very unfortunately missed by me. We split into 2 groups for accompanied nature walks round the reserve and the "other half" were very lucky to see an otter in Chrome Broad, only a short time after "our half" had left the hide there. I went there several times during the remainder of the stay but was unlucky. David Holmes, the How Hill director was delighted to at last have confirmation that otters are on the reserve, but he was sorry that he missed seeing it himself. In his 12 years in charge he has never seen one.

It was a thoroughly relaxing week-end, away from all the hassle of modern day life, and I can very much recommend it.

John Butcher.

ANOTHER BUTTERFLY ABERRATION.

In the last newsletter (No. 49) I mentioned that it might be worth looking out for butterflies of a different hue. On May 30th a fresh but very pale "bluish white" Common Blue was spotted on Beeston Common. As it was particularly lively, only settling for a few seconds at a time, I was not able to see its underside clearly to determine if there was any further variation. The strange thing was that it occurred in almost the same place as the scaleless Small Copper was found the previous year.

Francis Farrow.

A TALE OF A STING.

While cutting the privet hedge with the electric hedge trimmer on 1st July, I became aware that my hand was being pricked. It was then I realised that the air was full of yellow and black striped insects buzzing loudly. A quick glance at where I had cut the hedge showed that I had narrowly missed slicing the side off a wasp's nest.

I beat a hasty retreat and counted three small bumps on the back of my hand. Later that day I returned to watch the wasps repair and build their nest. It was positioned about three feet above the ground, west facing behind a large bush and about 7 inches in diameter. In shape it looks somewhat like a swede with the entrance to one side at the bottom of the tapered end.

The following day I caught one of the returning wasps and checked it out. I came to the conclusion it was *Dolichovespula media*. A call to Ken Durrant confirmed the species on position and shape of the nest. According to Tony Irwin's paper in the Transactions (Vol. 29 part 3, p241) it appears they arrived about five years ago and have steadily spread. In that account a nest was taken from Cley to Kelling Heath, which is only a short buzz away with a favourable wind.

Francis Farrow.

A COLONY OF RED EYED DAMSELFLIES

This year at the Lound Waterworks reserve, there has been a colony of red eyed damselflies, *Erythromma najas*, in fair numbers too. The yellow water lily, *Nuphar lutea*, grows most abundantly here and suits their habits well.

The females have been fairly easy to find at rest in the bank-side vegetation but the males are found along the banks only occasionally. They tend to spend much of their time at rest on the floating leaves of *Nuphar* moving from one leaf to another or flying around over the water. I have observed hundreds at a time on the lily leaves.

I have seen pairs in tandem occasionally so they are breeding, which looks good for the future.

I have seen them in previous years here but only spasmodically and not in the numbers of this year.

At first glance the males could be confused with the males of *Ischnura elegans* but it's merely a case of getting one's eye in and then they can be spotted quite easily even when some distance away. They are more robust than *I. elegans* in fact more so than most of the other damselfs and they do not allow as close an approach as that species. In my experience, when approached, they tend to either fly out over the water or if there are trees around they will sometimes fly up into the branches well above head height and if any movement is made toward them, they will quickly dart away.

It is my hope that this colony will thrive here and remain for many years. The signs are good because the water here is very carefully monitored against pollution of any kind due to the fact that it eventually ends up as drinking water.

Tony Brown.

RANATRA LINEARIS

On 6th April 1993 I found four specimens of this rare water bug in a Horsey dyke and duly reported them to Bob Driscoll for recording. (Incidentally, they were wrongly recorded in Vol 30 of the Transactions as being found on 6. 4. 83.)

Whenever I have been sampling various waters, dykes, ponds etc, I have always looked out for them with little success, that is until recently. On 8. 4. 95. I sampled a dyke at Haddiscoe TM 458986 and netted a single specimen of *R. linearis*. It took a further hour or so before I netted a second and in the next thirty minutes I netted four more making six in all. On 16. 4. 95. I returned to the area and netted four more specimens, three of which I took home with me on 20. 4. 95. I displayed them in an aquarium with many other freshwater creatures at a meeting of the Gt. Yarmouth Naturalists' Society in order that the members could see them. They were returned unharmed to the area the following day. On 28. 4. 95. I netted six more.

I realise of course that after the first specimens were found, subsequent findings of the species may have been for a second or even third time but notwithstanding this fact, there does appear to be a thriving colony of this species in this location.

Tony Brown.

This information was first in
Natterjack May 1995 No 49
the map was larger.

The location of the new venue for talks and Photographic Group meetings is St. John's Parish Hall, Mariners Lane (off Ber Street), Norwich (see map). Look out for Sabers Garage on the corner of Ber Street and Mariners Lane. The hall is close to the Inner Link Road, the Ring Road and the Southern Bypass, not to mention the temporary Lending Library. We shall also have the use of the Norwich City Council car park next to the hall.



A JOURNEY THROUGH THE WESTERN ISLES

The Western Isles lie off the north-western coast of Scotland, and stretch for 130 miles from Barra Head to the Butt of Lewis. The main islands are South Uist, Benbecula and North Uist, linked by causeways opened in the 1960's; and the single island of Harris and Lewis, split into its constituent parts by a high range of hills. South Uist can be reached by ferry from Oban in 6-8 hours; while Lewis can be reached from Ullapool in about 3 hours. A two hour ferry crossing between North Uist and Harris completes the link through the full length of the islands, and also provides access from Skye.

It was through this last link that we first made our acquaintance with the Outer Isles, taking a day trip to Harris while camping in Skye in 1985. In 1990 we worked the islands from south to north, starting in Oban and ending in Ullapool, while in August 1994 we reversed the trip to work from north to south, camping first of all at Shawbost on the west coast of Lewis, then at Linciate on Benbecula.

The west coast of Lewis offers glorious white shell sand beaches and a wealth of ancient monuments, including the Callanish Stone Circle (second in importance to Stonehenge) and an iron age brooch at Dun Carloway (second in importance only to the great brooch of Mousa on Shetland).

The croftlands and machairs abound with wild flowers: red clover, hayrattle, lady's bedstraw, eyebright, harebell, red bartsia, meadow rue and burdock. On our first walk at Shawbost we saw all five species of bumblebees which occur in the Hebrides: *B. distinguendus*, long since lost from Norfolk; *B. muscorum smithianus*, an impressive insect with orange/red thorax and yellow abdomen; *B. jonellus*, the hebridean form with buff-tipped abdomen; *B. magnus* and *B. hortorum* - the only one of the five to occur in Norfolk.

Corn Buntings jangled their song from the machairs while Red-throated Divers wailed from the lochans whenever rain threatened. Peregrine and Short-eared Owl hunted the dunes by the Benbecula campsite, where evening walks along the beach would find Snipe, Dunlin and Sanderling. The song of Curlew bubbled from the water's edge while the plaintive call of Golden Plover rang from the croftlands behind.

Northern Darter *Sympetrum nigrescens* and Black Darter *S. danae* were on the moors where Ravens, Buzzards and Merlins might be found. In 1990 we had seen Otters at Balranald and in Benbecula. This year we had seen fresh tracks of a mother and cub on the beach at Gt Berneray on Lewis; then toward the end of the holiday we watched in delight as one swam towards us across a sea loch in North Uist to hunt for fish in a small bay below us. Successful at last it floated on its back to devour its prey, then gambolled across a stony headland to spraint on a rock before swimming off.

We had contemplated a day trip to Barra, but opted instead for the shorter ferry crossing to Eriskay, just off the southern tip of South Uist. This is a much smaller island and therefore one that we could do adequate justice to in a short visit on foot. It is well populated but with a true island feeling. Grey seals basked on the rocks in the sound; and in a year in which they were scarce in Norfolk, we delighted in the sight of Small Tortoiseshell butterflies thronging the hillside flora. But best of all was the discovery of Mottled Grasshopper on the machair, a new 10-km square record for the Outer Hebrides, and a new offshore island record.

Our journey home to Oban was to provide a memorable day long cruise through Hebridean waters. We had opted for the Sunday departure because this gave a leisurely 10am start, sailing first to Barra, to give us a look at this elusive isle, before crossing the Minch into the Sound of Mull.

We had already seen Porpoise and Bottle-nosed Dolphin on the earlier ferry crossings of the holiday. This journey was to add first of all White-sided Dolphin, then Minke Whale. The slow, long roll of the Minke Whale as it breaks the surface is distinctive. We had seen them four years previously passing a headland north of Stornoway, now we watched one in the open ocean, seeing the long arched back roll through the water, waiting for the small confirmatory dorsal fin set on the lower back toward the tail flukes.

More was to come. Manx Shearwaters, then a small black bird with white rump flitting across the ship's bows: Storm Petrels in the open ocean, flitting low over the waves with the white rump showing at remarkably long range. Between us we saw perhaps half a dozen singles, or small groups. And it was while watching for more that we saw a large, triangular fin cutting across the path of the boat. We dashed through the bar and out to the other side to see at close range the immense dorsal fin of Orca Whale. Susan, my daughter, saw mother and calf as their black and white shapes sank below the waves before we all dashed to the back of the boat hoping for another view which never came.

We went seeking bumblebees, and were rewarded with the majesty of the ocean's greatest creatures. We will return, and so should you.

David Richmond.