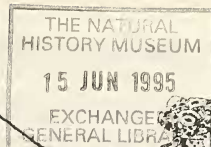




Number 49

# THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK



May 1995

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

The prospect of tomorrow is generally far more enticing for me than what happened yesterday but for the past year I have been looking backwards far more than is usual. The occasion has been the need to delve into the *Transactions* of the Society to find material to fill the regular 125th. Anniversary slot provided by the *Eastern Daily Press* in its Saturday editions. A year ago the prospect of finding enough items seemed rather daunting. With the help of good friends the feature was filled with ease. Not only that, we now realise there are so many good stories to tell, far more in fact than the number of Saturdays in the year would allow.

There is delight in looking at past achievements and the strange tales told by our predecessors. There is also the danger of becoming preoccupied with the past and the complacency that goes with it. There is some feeling of relief that we can now concentrate on the future and get on with the business of auditing the wildlife of the county, Project Wildlife 2000. By the time these notes are read, there will have been a special meeting of Council to work out an effective plan of campaign. Time has a habit of running away with us and we cannot afford duplication of effort.

As for looking to the future, we were given a wonderful example at our last indoor meeting of the Spring when Geoff Watts illustrated his talk on the planting of his very own wood. How many members have I heard say they would love to own their very own wood? That is the not so secret dream of many of us. I know of only one person who has made that dream come true. The expenditure of time and effort has been enormous and not everyone would be prepared to make that commitment, but what a wonderfully positive undertaking.

Rex Hancy.

Members of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society who are interested in mosses, are invited to attend the lectures and field excursion which form part of the British Bryological Society AGM proceeding. The AGM is being held at UEA this year, from 8<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> September.

Please contact the local Secretary, (Richard Fisk, 1, Paradise Row, Ringsfield, Beccles, Suffolk. NR34 8LQ. Tel. 01502 714968) if interested in attending, so that he can make appropriate arrangements for coffee, seating, etc.

## NATURAL HISTORY OF WELLS - NEXT - THE - SEA

A delightful little book has just been published, mainly designed for the visitor to the above town who is interested in the natural history of this part of the north Norfolk coast.

With a copy in hand it would enhance any walk along the pinewoods, marsh or tideline. Starting at the carpark, it describes much of the flora and fauna found in these areas. Ten species of shells are illustrated as are a few of the specialist plants.

Moderately priced at £1.99 it can be obtained post free to members from the author Paul Banham 17 High St. Wells - next - the - Sea, Norfolk. NR23 1EW. If you are visiting the town it can be obtained from Never Ending Stories, Stave St.

Ken Durrant.

## ROOT GALL ON GARDEN EVERGREEN

Last year Ben Campbell of Great Hockham sent me a large gall he had found on the root of a Leyland Cypress. He told me the tree was one of a row started off as cuttings some thirty years previously by his father. The gall was ovoid in shape and measured 10cm. by 9 cm.. I believed the gall to have been caused by bacteria.

At the last indoor meeting of the season, Janet Smith presented me with another specimen she had just dug from her garden. This gall matched the other in size though much rounder in outline. It looked rather like a discoloured, slightly distorted cricket ball. In both cases the galled root was less than half a centimetre in diameter.

I have sawn one in half to reveal the cross-section. The point of origin is clearly seen and the stages of growth are marked by curving rings. The texture is woody and I intend to polish one section to bring out the pattern and leave the other as cut.

There are probably many examples not found or ignored. I would be pleased to hear of others. So far I have found no references in the literature.

Rex Hancy

Extract from "White's" 1845 NORFOLK

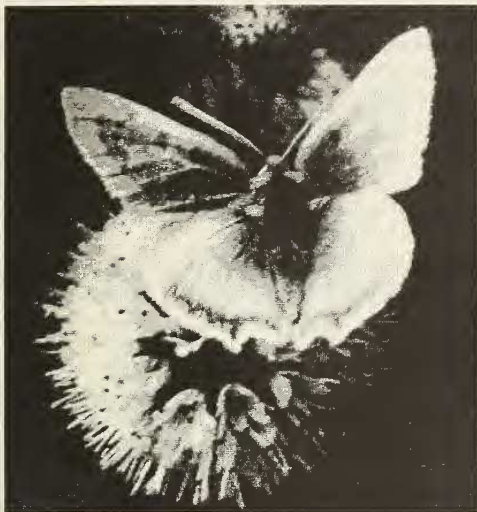
### GREAT YARMOUTH - Rare Plants

"Rare Plants, - among which may be enumerated, *Arundo arenaria peploides*, or sea chick-weed, growing upon the beach, near the turf of the common; the *Bunias cakile*, or sea-rocket, rendered distinctly visible by its enlivening flowers of purple-hue, shooting above the shingle; the *Convolvulus soldenella*, or sea-bird weed; the *Eryngium maritimum eryngo*, or sea-holly, scattered indiscriminately over the beach; and the *Ononis repens*, or creeping restharrow, with many others frequently sought after and admired."

It would be interesting to see if the above plants mentioned in the extract can still be found by Members of the Society in 1995.

Mary Dorling.

## BUTTERFLY ABERRATIONS



The Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas* shown in the photograph was found on Beeston Regis Common, August 1994. It represents a scaleless example which may be due to some adverse developmental condition e.g temperature, or disease or an hereditary factor. Such aberrations in lepidoptera are worth keeping a look out for and with this winter/spring weather changing its mind almost daily the prospect of such individuals occurring may be that much higher this year.

Francis Farrow.

## HOST AND PARASITES

Recently I received a record for the fungus *Cortinarius violaceus* which is a rarity and confirmation by specimen would be required. The fungus duly arrived but proved to be the Wood Blewit *Lepista nuda*.

This was kept for any fungus gnats etc which might emerge, and eventually two species arrived *Tarnania fenestralis* and *Synplasta excogitata*.

A few days after, some parasitic winged Hymenoptera emerged which belong to *Plectiscinae*.

The following day a batch of another Hymenopterous parasite emerged, similar in size to the previous, but clearly differing in characters.

We have two fungus gnats and two parasites. The question is what is the relationship between them?

Reg Evans.

## A FOLLOW UP ON PHOLCUS.

On Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> April a number of members assisted in the Countryside exhibition in the village hall Corpusty by staging various Natural History displays.

During the afternoon when talking to our colleagues Dr. Dick Hamond, who had just arrived, I noticed something move from off his hair and onto his shoulder. When captured it turned out to be a juvenile *Pholcus phalangioides*.

We were debating whether it had travelled all the way from Morston on his hair as Rex said that he had records all along the coast as far as Hunstanton so it seemed a possibility.

However Rex investigated the storeroom in the hall and discovered another juvenile in the corner of the ceiling. We then visited the gents and lo and behold Rex spotted an adult female in one corner whilst I found a fine male plus a moulted skeleton in the other.

It may be worth looking in your village halls for further records of this Daddy Long-legs Spider.

Ken Durrant.

## A FLAT BACKED MILLIPEDE AND HER EGGS

This millipede is very common under damp wood or bark where she makes a nest covering the off-white eggs with a raised dome which appears to consist of chewed wood. The construction is firm and the parts are glued together concealing the eggs. The millipede is often found curled around the nest as if protecting.

In one instance the nest was found broken open revealing some 30 eggs. A carnivorous beetle Larva (not seen before) was blamed and removed.

The next day the nest had been repaired the eggs no longer visible and the millipede had returned in attendance again!

Reg Evans.

## ARACHNOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

During September 1994 I received a phone call from a lady who had attended a talk I gave on spiders. She described a spider that her son had found in large numbers beneath the floorboards of an old chapel he was renovating in Mundham near Loddon. I was unable to ascertain the species from what transpired to be an excellent description so requested a specimen. One was provided and I could hardly contain my excitement on seeing it. An enormous female *Meta bourneti* was there before me, her magnificence insulted by the jam jar in which she rolled about. Like all orb weaving spiders she was like a "fish out of water" once removed from her spinings.

I am led to believe that this is the first time this species has been recorded in the County. There are probably about twelve localities in the whole country where it is known.

*Meta bourneti* is one of Britains largest spiders with a distinctly sinister appearance. It has dark maroon legs and a glossy, leathery, orange - brown abdomen overlain with patterns in dark blue-grey. It lives in caves, cellars and wells. In this case it survived in the 18 inch space between damp clay and floorboards in the disused Victorian chapel. The only spider it could possibly be confused with is its slightly smaller, close relative *Meta menardi* which shares similar habitats and is also rarely encountered. The chapel, having been completely renovated was no longer a suitable habitat. With the new owners keen assistance four remaining females and a quantity of eggs sacs were removed to a deep, damp cellar in Acle. The egg sacs are enormous. They resemble loose cotton wool balls one and a half inches in diameter with a multitude of lethargic spiderlings clustered in a dark, seething ball in its centre.

I wondered what use an orb web could be in a deep underground habitat and kept one spider in a tank with strategically placed sticks in order to observe its web spinning. This failed, it merely strung a few strands around then hung upside down from the gauze cover. She ate drone flies *Eristalis tenax* placed in the tank but appeared to ignore woodlice.

When set free in the new cellar all the spiders stayed in the area released but moved up to the ceiling where they spin orb webs close together where the ceiling met the wall. The webs hung at an angle of forty-five degrees from the ceiling to the wall and there the spiders would hang upside down week after week in the darkness. What an existence?

At the time of writing May 1995 the future of the new colony looks bleak. One very healthy looking female remains. It appears that all of the spiderlings lie dead in the sac. The only hope is in stored, fertilized eggs inside the female. However I doubt if she was mature when captured. *Meta bourneti* shared its' chapel with the spider *Pholcus phalangioides* although it is not known if *Pholcus* lived actually under the floorboards. This spider is a lethal predator on the large house spider *Tegenaria duellica* and it also occurs in large numbers in the new cellar. Unfortunately this could spell disaster for our displaced refugees.

I believe that a general lack of interest in spiders and the fact that *Meta bourneti* favours depth and darkness underground combine to make this a rare spider. It is probable that this spider is more common than records show. We would all do well to take a deep interest in holes in the ground! Whether full of workmen, water, old bones or whatever, we never know what Arachnoligical secrets they may hold.

Garth Coupland.

## DARWINIAN TRAITS?

On Sunday 23rd April 1995 while walking around Beeston Regis Common a jay was noted amongst some alders, not particularly unusual in itself as jays are frequent visitors to the Common. Jays are magnificent birds with their pink and black plumage and vivid blue wing patches. Such striking birds deserve something more than a secondary glance so it was we trained the binoculars onto it as it sat on a broken and somewhat rotted branch. It held in its beak a short twig and we wondered if was it collecting for nest building? The twig was about 1½ times as long as its beak, not particularly robust for a jay's nest, however, its next move revealed all. The jay turned into one of "Darwin's finches" as it started to probe the rotten branch with the twig! The action did not last many seconds, either the twig broke or it was dropped and the bird returned to the more usual behaviour of using its powerful bill to attack the branch. No mention of such behaviour occurs in the appropriate *BWP* volume for jay or siberian jay.

Francis Farrow and Alec Humphreys.

## EXTRA FUNGUS FORAY

Saturday 2nd September 10.30 am. organised by Norwich Fringe Project Horsford TG 184176 St. Faiths Common car park. The car park is on the right when approaching from Horsford. No Charge.

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



## PROGRAMME NOTES

The following are additional details for some of the items in the 1995/96 programme. Please refer to the new programme card for the full list of dates, times and grid references.

**Sunday 18th June** Barney Wood. Park on the sugar beet pad in the farmyard at Wood Farm.

**Wednesday 21st June** Ringstead and Snettisham Beach. There is a charge at Snettisham Beach car park.

**Sunday 9th July** Natural Surroundings. Peter Loosely would appreciate lists of anything seen on the guided walk or afterwards.

**Sunday 23rd July** Brancaster. Peter Lambley will try to provide enough clipboards for the transects, but if you can bring your own it will help.

**Saturday 8th September** Fossicking for moths. This will be held at Mike and Shirley Hall's home, Hopefield, Norwich Road, Scole, the entrance to which is on the east side of the A140 near the junction with the A1066 to Diss. Please use the car park at Scole Carvery a few yards further towards Ipswich. Numbers are limited to 20. To book your place, phone Janet Smith, 01603 33919.

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.

