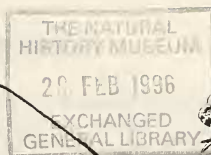




Number 52

THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK



May 1996

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

NORFOLK BIRDING - PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

9.30am (to about 6.00 pm) Saturday 30th March 1996 at UEA

Moss Taylor has organised, on behalf of the BTO and the Norfolk Bird Club, a one-day conference with the above title for which he has brought together a band of excellent speakers (Jeremy Greenwood, David Sadler, Ron Harold, David Parkin and Ian Wallace).

The Conference is open to all those who are interested, whether or not they are BTO or NBC members. Cost is £7 including tea and coffee (lunch may be purchased on site). For further information call Moss Taylor on 01263 823637.

'IDENTIFICATION' of wild flowers, birds, butterflies etc, Photography for beginners.
Corpusty Village Hall
Sunday 31st March 1996 11 am - 4 pm.

PRESIDENT'S PARISH POTTER AND SOCIAL GATHERING

Our President elect, John Goldsmith, has arranged an afternoon of events in his home parish of Seething on Saturday 25th May. Meet at Seething Village Hall at 2.30 p.m.

The following activities will be available:

1. a short walk around the parish.
2. a longer walk on footpaths through neighbouring farmland.
3. for those bringing bikes, a cycle ride along green lanes in the vicinity.

Refreshments will be served in the village hall during the afternoon.

Later it is hoped to visit the World War 2 airfield, and at dusk to watch a Natterer's bat colony.

Put the date in your diaries!

INDEXES TO TRANSACTIONS VOLS 24-29

Separate indexes have been prepared to each of these volumes (1976-1993), including the Bird and Mammal Reports which form part of them. The format is A5 (same as Transactions).

To receive copies, please send two second-class stamps (19p) for each volume (Vols 24 + 25 count as one) plus one stamp for return postage (regardless of how many are ordered in total) to Tony Leech, 3, Eccles Road, Holt, NR25 6HJ. To receive all six indexes, please send ten second-class stamps (including postage).

PHOTOGRAPHIC GROUP

The photographic group's final meeting of this season will be a members' evening on Monday, 22nd April - an opportunity for any member of the society, not just group regulars, to show their recent slides: any subject, any country. So that we can show as wide a range of possible, will members please restrict themselves to not more than 25 slides but, even if you have only a few you would like to show, do bring them along. The more contributors to the evening the better.

A reminder to group members: On Friday, 12th April, we give our annual show to the society. The topic is "The Coast in Focus": preferably the East Anglian coast but slides on any aspect of any coast will be welcome. Will group members please let me know what material they have available for inclusion in the show.

David Paull.

HELP NEEDED FOR BTO PROJECTS

The British Trust for Ornithology is looking for volunteers to help with the following investigations in South-East Norfolk:

Heronies Census.

Sample Census of Rookeries.

Breeding Bird Survey.

For further details contact Paul Gallant 01493 656211

Help is also needed with the following ongoing national projects: Project Barn Owl, Set-aside project, Common Bird Census, Garden Bird-watch, Nest Record Scheme, Waterways Bird Survey and Wetland Bird Survey. For further details contact BTO HQ 01842 750030 or, for any of the BTO projects, NNNS Sec, Tony Leech 01263 712282.

NORFOLK BIRD REPORT

The 1994 Norfolk Bird Report has by all accounts been well received. The successful combination of line drawings and full colour photographs, feature articles, ringing recoveries and systematic list covering every species recorded in the county will be continued in the 1995 issue.

In an effort to make the now extended classified list both more informative and fascinating a series of additional comments on selected species relating to the events of earlier years (including unusual migratory movements and extracts from diaries which have only recently come to light) will be incorporated.

The Norfolk Bird Report was the first Report to include Vignettes which appear nowadays in every Report in the country. It was also one of the first counties to go all-colour. The latest innovation including supplemental comments will also be a first.

The 1995 issue will again be prepared in association the Norfolk Bird Club. The Bird Club's extended recording team is determined to produce a systematic list in time to meet the printer's schedule for an early autumn publication. This is essential to enable the Society to recover the total of copies sold at a number of outlets including the reserves at Cley, Titchwell, Holme and Strumpshaw.

Michael Seago.

NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

A naturalist friend from the north has sent me a copy of his local society's latest publication. I am very impressed. The subject is the survey of a disused quarry, its flora and fauna. Visits were made every month over a two year period by a nucleus of enthusiasts who then wrote up their notes, observations and comments. The 72 page publication was another team effort by members using their personal computers, printers, sketch pads and somebody's staple gun. The end product is a fine achievement, a tribute to their assiduous and scientific approach and a real bench-mark data base for the area concerned. All this by a small section of a society that numbers around 50 members in total!

I wonder if the data would have been presented in a better way if there had been a supporting group of say, 200? Maybe so but I can guarantee the process of production would have been less fun and far more fraught. "Should we approach a commercial printer?" "How can we pay the bill out of our modest funds?" All sorts of questions and endless committees to try to find answers with less time to collect the information! I expect the day will come. These things take on a life of their own and there is the endless quest for perfection.

Publications were never out of my mind last autumn. As we all know, our society began publishing immediately after its formation and set itself a very high standard of content and quality of production. There is cause for justifiable pride in our achievement and the fact that authors of the highest standing are pleased to see their papers in our transactions speaks for itself.

The innovation of a separate annual bird report, later to be amalgamated with the mammal report, was another major step forward. That was over four decades ago. The original editor still soldiers on, having nurtured his infant document into a publication that has gone far beyond even his wildest dreams of all those years ago. What is essentially an amateur, unpaid, spare-time occupation could be assumed to be professionally produced.

I wonder if the average reader stops to consider how this has been brought about? What began as an occupation for winter evenings before spring got under way has grown into a time-consuming monster that eats into most of the year. A team of editorial assistants has assisted and helped smooth the way for many years. Unfortunately the path has been beset by serious difficulties no-one could foresee during the last two issues and publication has been inordinately delayed.

What happens now? Certainly everyone concerned is aware of our responsibility to the past as well as the future. The highest standard has been set and we are determined this Society maintains it.

Rex Hancy

WINTER LIFE

On the 14 December I had to give a talk on 'Butterflies and Moths' and as usual I like to take with me my insurance policy, a drawer of pinned specimens in case the projector fails, and a few live moths. At this time of the year it is often difficult to come up with live moths. So I was extremely pleased to see on the night of the 12th several Winter moths fluttering like mobile sequins in the light of the lantern on my late evening round shutting up the chickens.

Since the snow and frosts of the previous week had hardly cleared I was somewhat surprised at the moths' prompt appearance but determined to get some to show my audience I spent several tens of minutes following these males about with my lantern hoping they would lead me to a female. I also searched the shed doors, branches of hedge shrubs and the orchard trees for females as I passed but to no avail. I was however more surprised by the number of other creatures about that night - half-grown garden spiders that sat on partly made webs on the sheds, woodlice and harvestmen that clambered over the firelog piles near the ground and even a hawthorn shield bug that purposefully trundled up and down the overhanging twigs. Winter is a time that we tend to imagine as void of insect activity outside.

Eventually one of the children had to be dispatched to collect me for our meal. Disappointed I left the fluttering males behind and lighted the way indoors, as I turned to fasten the gate the lantern bathed the gate post with an amber glow and there, lo and behold, sat a pair of winter moths, the female at the top, looking like a detached bud, and the male, with his silvery wings spread, below.

Robert Maidstone.

CAMBERWELL BEAUTY

Following reports of Camberwell Beauty sightings through the late Summer I was amazed and delighted when one turned up in our garden and stayed at least four days.

It all began at eleven o' clock on Saturday 9th September. I glanced out of the patio window to catch sight of what seemed to be a falling leaf which came to rest on the rockery a metre or so from the door. The "leaf" was the fleungury and cream Camberwell Beauty.

With eyes popping out we dared not open the door for some ten minutes lest the butterfly depart as suddenly as it had appeared. Predictably, when we did emerge the butterfly flew off and, as we were to discover, showed a remarkable ability to disappear. Some ten minutes later we spotted the butterfly on some bare earth, wings open. Shortly, it took flight to flap around before coming to rest on one of many windfall pears. It fed on several pears for forty minutes then again vanished to be relocated some minutes later on the compost heap. It was well camouflaged on the compost where it remained for almost an hour, hardly moving apart from slowly opening and closing its wings.

At two o' clock, the butterfly was again airborne, circling a small area when it suddenly vanished "into thin air". The whole garden was then searched for forty-five minutes by four people before the butterfly reappeared "out of the blue" and settled to another bout of feeding on a pear. It fed for a further forty minutes until at 3.30p.m. it suddenly flew up, over the house and was seen no more that day.

The next morning the butterfly appeared at ten o' clock alternately flying and sunning on various surfaces - plastic, wood and vertically on a hawthorn hedge. Until 11.30a.m. it fed on windfall apples in the neighbour's garden. Although disturbed by photographers it did not attempt to fly far and spent most of the time on the apples or shingle. Eventually it returned to the pears in our garden but this time selected a large bird-pecked apple which I had placed among them.

It spent the rest of the day on the one apple, apart from a forty-five minute period when it absented itself, until flying off, as before at 3.30p.m.

The butterfly was probably present on the next day but was last seen, again on its apple, on Tuesday the 12th departing at the later time of 4.20 p.m.

This Camberwell Beauty was in excellent condition with just a few scales missing from the trailing edges of the hindwings. Some pale veins were visible on the right forewing. Wherever it walked or shuffled its wings some abrasion would be inevitable. Otherwise the colouring was rich and unfaded. This would suggest that this butterfly had originated later than the earlier reports, possibly coincident with the Greenish Warbler influx of early September.

It was interesting to note how such a large and distinctive butterfly could be so elusive. It spent most of the time at ground level and when resting on dark surfaces was easily overlooked.

Ivor White.

FROZEN FOOD

The last few days I have been able to get on with the digging and while passing one of our many water tanks, this one happened to be an old bath, today, (22nd December) I noticed what looked like fine straight white roots littering the bottom amongst the dead leaves and a few inches of water. After several minutes of poking them about I realised they were the dead bleached bodies of Blood worms, *Chironomus sp.*, that were commonly found in most of the tanks.

Since I could not recall seeing these die off before during the winter, I checked several of my other tanks. One not sixty feet away across the vegetable patch was dotted with snails slowly moving through the water several of whom were adorned with green hydra, all shew no effects of the frost. Another still murky from its use by the ducks, was alive with daphnia and cyclops, but a third partly sheltered by an old tarpaulin, and well silted with goose dung, contained dozens of white, putrid dead rat-tailed maggots. I could not however find any more bloodworms dead or alive.

Normally we see our smallholding as a reservoir for aquatic and semi-aquatic creatures, especially of nutrient rich waters or effluent pools, and the birds that feed on them. But following the dry summer I have not seen any winter gnats, whose larvae feed in damp rich soils, so far this autumn and now this kill of aquatic larvae by the hard frosts leaves me wondering how the local insectivorous birds will fare as their stocks of food must be at a very low ebb.

Robert Maidstone.

ARACHNOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

In the May 1995 bulletin I reported the first known site in the County for the superb spider *Meta bourneti*. This site is now destroyed.

I am sad to announce the failure of the few rescued survivors to colonise a cellar to which they were moved.

However I am please to report a second site at Strumpshaw near Acle.

Following the lifting of a sewer inspection cover I found five specimens living together in the small inspection chamber with the open sewer running through the bottom. One, a large female, must be the largest British spider I have yet seen and her sinister beauty was remarkable.

Keep looking in holes!

Araneus diadematus, the incredibly abundant garden spider is very variable in its background colour. This ranges from orange through every shade of brown to dark grey. Occasionally specimens are found with the familiar white markings reduced to a lesser or greater extent. I found a cherry-pink, unmarked specimen at Acle which looked good enough to eat.

These variations appear to have no reason or particular significance except perhaps to show what a successful and even adaptable spider this is in terms of the different habitats it thrives in.

However, during a mid - September visit to the high moorlands in the mountains of Sutherland near Scourie I found natural selection at work using this variability. The moorland is a bare, windswept wilderness. The only cover is found in rocks jutting out from the peat bogs and heather. On the south face of such a rock I found *diadematus*.

I had followed a strong line of silk from the ground to the rock but could not see a spider until I touched it and it moved. This large female was perfectly camouflaged as it sat, exposed, on a patch of the black and light grey lichen which was found on all the rocks in the region. The spider's typical markings were reduced somewhat to form a seemingly patternless scattering of white spots on a jet black background.

I went on to find many spiders, always on the south faces of rocks. Every typically coloured and marked specimen was small and almost certainly not mature. The only large specimens were the lichen mimics.

This led me to conclude that the spiders took at least two years to mature and that by the second year all the typically coloured individuals had fallen prey to birds leaving only our camouflaged variation to survive to maturity. This situation must eventually increase the numbers of the variation exactly as seen in the famous Peppered moth example.

Whether any habitat in Norfolk is large enough to support a similar example I very much doubt.

Garth. M. Coupland.

AN UNUSUAL *PENICILLIUM* ON DEER DUNG

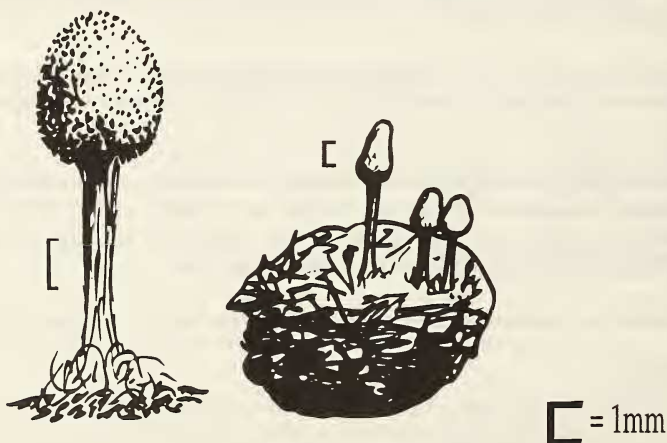
Several hundred species of fungus occur on herbivore dung, most of them not occurring anywhere else. Some are toadstools but many require a stereo microscope to appreciate their incredible beauty. They develop on dung kept slightly moist in closed transparent boxes on a window-sill. Fairly comprehensive keys for the identification of microfungi on dung are to be found in Ellis and Ellis (1988a) although their use inevitably demands a microscope.

In November 1995 I collected a few pellets of muntjac dung from Holt Lowes (TG084371) and a week later two had developed a distinctively shaped fungus which appeared unlike any described by Ellis and Ellis (incidentally, the brother and sister-in-law of the late Ted Ellis). The puzzle was solved by the arrival of a copy of *MYCOLOGIST*, a journal of the British Mycological Society, which bore on its back cover an unmistakable photograph of the same fungus growing in laboratory culture - *Penicillium claviforme*. I had always presumed that all *Penicillium* spp were mould-like but *P. claviforme* is the exception, producing coremia ('stalks') up to 8mm high topped with a grey-green tuft of asexual spores in long chains - *penicillium* is latin for paintbrush.

The author of the article (Fenwick, 1994) confirmed my identification and informed me that he had only once found the fungus in the wild; on a decaying rose-hip in Newcastle upon Tyne. It is also reported from Warwickshire (Clerk, 1980), again on a decaying berry. Most fungi are fairly specific in their choice of substratum but *P. claviforme* has also been found on rabbit dung in Darlington Cemetery (Legg, 1992). Mrs Barbara Hancy made the interesting suggestion to me that the fungus could have been growing on fragments of berries ingested and voided by the deer. Indeed, the dung did contain red berry remains but the fungus had already been removed before a connection could be established. Attempts to get the fungus to grow from rosehips collected from near the dung have not been successful. The fungus has not been recorded by Ellis and Ellis (1988b) in Suffolk nor, apparently, from Norfolk (Reg and Lil Evans, pers. comm.).

Tony Leech.

- Clark, M.C., ed, (1980) *A Fungus Flora of Warwickshire*
 Ellis, M.P. & J.P. (1988a) *Microfungi on Miscellaneous Substrates*
 Ellis, M.P. & J.P. (1988b) *Fungi and Slime moulds in Suffolk*
 Fenwick, G.A. (1994) *Mycologist* 9(4), 155
 Legg, A.W. (1992) *Vasculum* 77, 21-43



*Please send items for May Natterjack before 1st April. To Colin Dack
 12, Shipdham Rd, Toftwood, Dereham Norfolk NR19 1JJ*