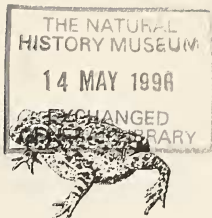




Number 53

# THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK



May 1996

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

This is the real May issue of Natterjack. The last time should have read February. I made a mistake and used a template for May. I apologise for this. Colin Dack.

## NORFOLK AND NORWICH NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

### PRESIDENT'S PARISH POTTER

SATURDAY MAY 25TH 1996

One of the very early concepts of the NNNS committee was that ideally, at some point in the future, the society would have at least one member resident in every parish of the county. This person would record the changing wildlife of that parish and offer advice if asked. We fall far short of this ideal, but many parishes still have a great deal to offer the naturalist in the way of interesting items to study, even if not quite as much variety or rarity as our more worthwhile nature reserves.

Accordingly, provided the President for 1996/7 gets "sworn in" at the AGM, he would like to offer the following parish-based excursion: -

Meet and park at Seething & Mundham Village Hall, Wheelers Lane, Seething, Grid Reference TM319977 at 2.30 p.m. There I hope to welcome anyone who cares to turn up (and I hope this might include a few interested residents of the surrounding parishes), and offer several alternative rambles, with display boards, maps and notes of places of interest and things to look out for. The hope is that not only can I point people towards items of interest, but that those with specialist interests will be able to add to our parish fauna and flora list. The notes will include several items where your ideas and views on a best course of possible future management would be welcomed.

- 1) A short range ramble (less than 1 mile) to take in the church and churchyard, the deserted medieval village site etc.
- 2) A slightly longer walk on some of the recently cleared footpaths over perhaps about 2 - 3 miles.
- 3) A 6 mile hike for the fit and active, taking in some green lanes locally.
- 4) A circular route through surrounding parishes of about 10 miles, suitable for those who bring their mountain bike (or pony and cart)!

Afternoon tea with sandwiches, biscuits and cakes will be provided in the Village Hall from 4.30 p.m. with a chance for compiling and swapping notes, or a chat with friends old and new.

After tea the option is to disperse home, or come and look at bits of the World War Two Seething airfield, culminating in a bat-watch from sunset (c. 9 p.m.) if the animals play fair and turn up in the same place again this summer!

## 1996/97 PROGRAMME

Some items in the new programme need further explanation :

**Sunday 9 June:** This is to be a meeting open to the public and will be advertised around the county. Non-members will be charged £1. Experts will be on hand to lead walks starting at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. and participants will be invited to join whichever subject group interests them.

**Sunday 13 October:** An introduction to fungi has been arranged by Tony Leech and Mike Strong ( catering manager at Gresham's School ). It will include an introductory talk, a foray into the woods, a wild mushroom lunch, a short talk on mushroom cookery, and time for identification using microscopes in the school biology lab. Numbers will be limited to 20, and a charge will be made for the lunch. To book your place, phone Carol Haines (01603 867825).

### The late F. J. (Jim) Taylor Page 1909 - 1995

The sad news that Jim Taylor Page had passed away in Cumbria at the age of 86, on November 8th 1995 came as very bad news.

It was he who had breathed new life into the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society during the 1950s, started the British Deer Society and taught me biology at the City of Norwich School in the 1960s and a thousand other important tasks during his busy life

Although I had kept in touch with him through his period teaching at Brighton, then on to Hay Bridge Deer Museum and his Field Study Centre at Askham in the Lake District, we last saw him on a bright and sunny June day in his Penrith retirement home last summer, on our way up to Scotland. The bright twinkle in his eye still burned brightly, though we knew he had been unwell for a while. His burning enthusiasm of the day was "A Book of Five Pages" - his family history and autobiography which was well underway.

Who can remember the distribution of Dandelions on their school playing field from thirty years previously? He could; plus a million other facts! We really shall miss him deeply, but remember him fondly.

John and Sue Goldsmith.

It is our intention to write a longer obituary for the next transactions.

### LITTLE AND LARGE - THE MICROSCOPY GROUP MEETS THE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

It is 7.30 p.m.. on Wednesday 27th March. The microscopy Group have gathered at the Norwich Observatory near Seething to be entertained by colleagues in the Norwich Astronomical Society.

The sky is clear and lit by a bright quarter moon. Towards the west there appears to be a star much brighter than the rest - this is the planet Venus. High above us is the constellation known to many as the Plough or Big Dipper and to one side of it the Pole Star.

Our attention is drawn to something else that looks like a fuzzy star near to the pole star. But it isn't a star, it's a comet! As luck would have our meeting has coincided with a very good opportunity to see Comet Hyakutake and we are treated to a view of it though the Observatory's 30 inch reflector telescope.

Then we are given a scintillating lecture by Kevin Wright comparing the efforts of amateur and professional astronomers to photograph comets and stars, distant galaxies and nebulae. His slides include Hubble Space Telescope images down loaded from an internet link to NASA.

Afterwards there is time for gossip and a chance for the worlds of the very large and the very small to exchange views.

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The Microscopy Group arranges field trips and visits as well as indoor meetings at the Castle Museum and Seething. If you are interested then Tony Irwin at the Castle Museum on Norwich 223642 will be pleased to hear from you. If you are interested in the Astronomical Society visitors are always welcome at the Observatory on Friday evenings. Stephen Livermore.

## NORFOLK FLORA PROJECT

As it is aimed to publish the New Flora of Norfolk during the late summer of 1999, there are only two more full seasons for recording this summer and next. By the time you read this, it is hoped that the long cold winter and early spring will have given way, and our recorders will have been encouraged into the open air once more. Each year brings its own surprises, either in the form of plants found, or in the actual numbers of species to be found in a single tetrad.

1995 brought us several new records, notably the alien *Conyza sumatrensis* a relative of Canadian Fleabane, which turned up in Yarmouth, having become common in recent years in the London area. *Carex x pseudaxillaris*, the hybrid between Remote Sedge and False Fox Sedge, found near Tyrrel's Wood was new to the county, and I was rather bemused when I received 19 recording sheets from Paul and Ian Green, visitors to Norfolk from Somerset who put their week in the county to good use, to discover a long list of hybrid docks! I also received a hybrid dock record from one of our resident recorders.

How many plants can be found in a tetrad? It all depends on the variations in habitat. In the far west of the county, on the Fens near Wisbech, where there is virtually no variation at all, 80 to 100 species is almost the maximum that can be expected. In the east, the poorest tetrads are likely to be on the grazing levels, but even there the number ought to approach 200. In early July 1995, two of the east Norfolk recording group with permission to botanise on the Aldeby estate, covered the riverside itself, adjacent marshes and the vicinity of the Hall itself. A week later, the brothers Green mentioned above covered much of the rest of the village within the same tetrad, and by coincidence, another visitor, from Surrey this time, actually stayed at Aldeby Old Rectory and did some more recording. This resulted in a staggering tally for a 'midsummer visit' of 374 species. A spring visit will almost certainly take the total above 400. There must be many such!

Are there any 'new' botanists out there? Perhaps incomers who have not seen our previous appeals for help? If you would like to do some concentrated botanising over the last two seasons of our scheme, please contact me, Alec Bull, Hillcrest, East Tuddenham, Dereham, NR20 3JJ if you live east of a line from Blakeney Point to Garboldisham, or Mrs. G. Beckett, Bramley Cottage, Stanhoe, King's Lynn, PE31 8QF if you live in West Norfolk.

## A MORNING MEANDER

Marriott's Way has one end of its 21 miles at Hellesdon and is a disused railway track. The old Midland and Great Northern, affectionately known as the Muddle and Go Nowhere, comprise the part as far as Themelthorpe and the whole length of 21 miles to Aylsham is named after William Marriott who was chief engineer and manager of the M and G N system for 41 years. Passenger traffic ceased in February 1959. Freight movements continued from Aylsham to Lenwade until 1978.

10 members enjoyed a very pleasant walk along the old track at Hellesdon and Costessey on a wonderful spring morning on 27th March. It was interesting to note that the platform can be seen on the site of the old Hellesdon station, albeit somewhat overgrown.

Signs of spring were prominent with trees beginning to show greenery and many birds singing.

We were successful in identifying 29 species of bird, though there were no surprises. Normally the route is quiet with only a few people around, but alas we hit a bad day as some 800 pupils of Costessey High School were doing a sponsored walk. In all my years of going along there I had never seen so many people. To "avoid the crush" we walked down Red Bridge Lane and along a bank of the small River Tud back to Marriott's way. We were fortunate enough to see a Water Vole. In spite of all the youngsters it was agreed we had all had a pleasant time. In another 2 months or so there will be much of interest to see by way of wild flowers and butterflies as well as birds. If anybody would like a stroll sometime I will be delighted to accompany if requested. I look upon the route we covered as "my home patch", and go there quite often. We thought we may have had an early Chiffchaff but were unlucky.

John Butcher 01603 743315.

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

The inclosed membership form. If you have a friend who is interested in natural history and you believe would like to join the Society. Please give the form to them. More membership forms are available.

## ARISTOCRATIC GASTROPODS

Two years ago I decided it was time to start studying gastropods. I had the books but several attempts at the subject had failed, mainly because I was too lazy to put in the effort to leap the first hurdles.

They are a difficult class but experience gains you knowledge and that knowledge makes the going easier as you progress.

I persevered and the result is that I am now passionate about what my wife unkindly calls "blobs of gunk!".

All living things have their own "Jiz", a bird-watchers term I believe, which describes that remarkable variety of subtle differences which many species exhibit centered around a common theme. Gastropods are no exception and it is the knowledge to recognize the "Jiz" of each species the moment you see it which gives the academic, almost mystical aura that surrounds the dedicated naturalist in the eyes of the layman.

I did fairly well but there was one family which eluded me completely; the *Testacellidae*. These are strange slugs with a shield-like vestigial shell stuck to their rear ends which live underground and feed on worms and other invertebrates. According to the books they are very hard to find which has proved to be true.

In my desperation to see one I advertised for specimens via Rex Hancy's column in the E.D.P. using the illustration seen here. I had one reply only. A gentleman in Flordon had dug up two specimens of what turned out to be *Testacella scutulum* from the walled kitchen garden of his large country house. These slugs looked nothing like my illustration which was based on illustrations in other publications. I kept them and achieved some egg laying but never was lucky enough to observe their hunting techniques.

I am a Police Officer and during one night shift last autumn - was sent to a burglar alarm activation in Ormesby St. Margaret. In the process of searching the premises, a large country house, I went through the walled kitchen garden. There I saw a slug crawling across the ground. It was the "Jiz" of the animal which caught my eye in the torchlight. It did not quite fit any other slug I had ever seen before. It was *Testacella haliotidea*, the second of the two *Testacellids* found in our area. (*Testacella maugei*, the third member of the family only occurs in the west of Britain.).

I was thrilled. The owner of the country residence probably thought I was insane but at two o'clock in the morning kindly gave me permission to take away the "blob of gunk" on the end of my finger for photographing and study. This species actually fitted the illustration very well.

Due to their subterranean lifestyle and sporadic distribution the *Testacellids* are clearly overlooked and under-recorded. I would love to hear of, and visit other sites for these creatures and am always grateful for specimens (which will be treated as royalty).

The *Testacellids* reputedly favour well manured soil which clearly provides them with their prey. I wonder if they are in fact an Aristocratic Gastropod, living in walled, kitchen gardens in the great houses of England as their preferred habitat. Let's bring them down a peg or two by finding some in a less high-brow location.

Garth Coupland.





## WAXWINGS

As I write, at the end of March, it is obvious that this winter has been the best for sighting of waxwings for many years.

Looking at my personal records a party of 20 or so were near the Asda store in Norwich in 1991 and the last I saw prior to this year were 4 at Eaton on 21st April 1992. There have been only 16 irruption:s in the last 50 years, with the biggest in 1965/66. Perhaps when the statistics are known 1996 will surpass this.

In 1985 there was a single Waxwing in Old Costessey during early January which was found dead about a week after being first seen. Twitchers descended to obtain the "year tick". I wrote about this particular bird and Waxwings in general in an article for "Costessey News" and was subsequently requested by the editor to contribute a monthly article on Nature. Each winter I asked for sighting of Waxwings anywhere to be reported and just recently this has brought quite a deluge of calls - 26 in fact. Numbers have been between 1, in a garden all day on 29th February and 200 in a tree on 24th February. The lady in reporting 200 stated she had never seen anything like it before and did not know what they were. She checked at the library where she works I suggested she will probably see nothing like it again! I saw 27 in a tree in Notcutt's car park on Daniels Road, Norwich and my total between 9th February and 24th March is 140 in 8 different sightings. Again looking at my records I see that since I saw my first one I have totalled over the years only 50 - until now.

I think the Waxwing is probably my favourite bird, though I am very fond of the Swift. I never tire of watching the latters wonderful flight. Unfortunately neither are here permanently, one occasionally in winter and the other basically for 3 months of high summer.

John Butcher.

## THOMPSON COMMON - POOL FROGS - REQUEST FOR PHOTOGRAPHS

I have had a very helpful response to my request, in Natterjack No 51, to borrow photographs but more are still needed. Some members may have not responded because I forgot to include my name and address or telephone number with the original request so this time they are given below. If you have any photographs (slides or prints) of Thompson pool frogs.

Please contact me: John Buckley, 77, Janson Road, Shirley, Southampton SO15 5GL Tel: 01703 782966.



## MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Members who pay by cheque are reminded that subscriptions fell due on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1996. Current rates are £10 for ordinary and family members and £15 for affiliated groups. Please make cheques payable to Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society and send them to:

D. I. Richmond  
42, Richmond Rise,  
Reepham,  
Norfolk. NR10 4LS

From: .....  
Address: .....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## Earth-star.

During a recent Tetrad Flora meeting at Norton Subcourse on March 2nd, I found three small earth-stars on a bank beneath a hawthorn hedge. Alec Bull suggested the earth-star could be the Crowned Earth-star *Gastrum coronatum* and this is also the conclusion I arrived at after checking in Phillips (1981). It was, however, marked as rare in this book so I sought confirmation from Tony Leech, who remembered a paper on "Earth-stars" by Ted Ellis (1981) in the Transactions. In this paper it was stated that this particular earth-star was "one of our commoner species, to be found under hawthorns on hedge-banks and under conifers". Tony also had at hand a copy of a recent Kew publication on the group. This book contained 10km square UK distribution maps which showed east Norfolk and particularly the triangular area formed between Norwich, Gt. Yarmouth and Lowestoft to be well favoured. It appears to be a case of locally common, nationally rare - yet another small jewel for Norfolk.

Ellis, E.A. (1981) NNNS Transactions Vol. 25 (4) *Earth-stars (Gastraceae)* in Norfolk and Suffolk.  
Phillips, Roger (1981) *Mushrooms and other fungi of Gt. Britain and Europe*.  
Pegler, D.N. Laessoe, T. and Spooner B.M. (1995) *British Puffballs, Earthstars and Stinkhorns*.

Francis Farrow.

## Reminiscences.....

After the AGM (March 21st), listening to Ken Durrant's trip down memory lane, I got to musing on the slow foggy drive back to Sheringham about some of my "magical moments". Of course my memories are not back to the nostalgic 30's and 40's but being a child with early natural history interests I do recall what seems to be another world - the late 50's and early 60's. At this time tall holly and hawthorn hedges held Red-backed Shrikes, Nightjars and Stone Curlews nested around the Cromer-Holt ridge and Snipe raised their dark brown young on Beeston Bog. Red Squirrels were abundant in the woods and a Duck-billed Platypus was found on Sheringham beach. Yes, I did say Duck-billed Platypus. It was dead of course, but so unmistakable as it laid on the strand-line - about two feet long, close dark brown fur, webbed feet and that broad, flat diagnostic "bill". I remember it clearly, as if it was only yesterday, as my sister (12) and I (10) stared in astonishment. No camera to record the sighting and no "naturalist" contact to show - next day it was gone. I suspect it was an animal destined for a European Zoo that had died in transit and subsequently been thrown overboard. Such memories are vivid but without continuous record keeping of the common things we are in danger of losing sight of what is common. To-day we have the plight of the "common birds", the Skylark, the Tree Sparrow and the Reed Bunting etc. I could add that locally we also seem to have lost the Stock Dove, Lesser Redpoll and Willow tit. Such "disappearances" are not noted suddenly - it is only when we check our notebooks recording our observations over familiar walks that we become aware that certain things are no longer listed. Even in the ten years since the publication of the Norfolk Bird Atlas these changes are apparent - what of the next 10, 20 or 50 years - hopefully Wildlife 2000 will help future generations to be even more "protective" of a wide group of Norfolk's flora and fauna.

Francis Farrow.

Dear Colin,

Why not make a regular feature of personal memories "Down Memory Lane" - a note of some bygone natural history event that has stayed with you since childhood or later. It could put the natter back in "The Natterjack".

Francis.

Dear Francis,

I think this is a very good idea. It would help with small articles when there is space that needs to be used in Natterjack. I would like some Memories of when meadows were very species rich, full of fragrant flowers. Also to know more about the past members would be very interesting. Also as they are memories I could use them when there is space and it would be handy.  
Thankyou Colin.

*Please send items for August Natterjack before 1<sup>st</sup> July to Colin Dack  
12, Shipdham Rd, Toftwood, Dereham, Norfolk NR19 1JJ*

If you have any items for "Down Memory Lane" please do let us all read them. I am certain other members will enjoy them.