THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK

Number 56 February 1997

1997 Programme

Friday 21 February
Presidential Address. 'Wild Life'. Illustrated talk by John Goldsmith. St. John's Parish Hall at 7.30 pm. John is the mammal expert at the Norwich Museum, his main interest being bats.

Monday 3 March
A members' evening at the photographic group – but, as usual, open to all members of the Society. Group members are asked to bring along a selection of slides on any subjects, and all other members, especially anyone thinking of trying their hand at wildlife photography for the first time, are welcome to come along to the meeting at St John's Parish Hall at 7.30pm to pick up tips on techniques and equipment.

Friday 21 March
Annual General Meeting followed by 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly - A look at the World of Fungi', an illustrated talk by Tony Leech. St. John's Parish Hall at 7.30 pm. Tony is Secretary of the Society and teaches biology at Gresham's School.

Thursday 3 April
Group leader David Paull rounds off the photographic group season with an illustrated talk at St John's Parish Hall (7.30pm) about his latest trip to the USA: "With camera in Mile-high America", a whistle-stop circuit through Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico.

Sunday 13 April
Full day field meeting at Ling Common for mosses and lichens. Meet in car park opposite King's Lynn Golf Club at 11.00 am, TF 654239. It is hoped to map the occurrence of the lichen *Cetraria islandica,* Iceland Moss, which is rare in southern England. Leaders: Peter Lambley, English Nature and a lichen specialist and Robin Stevenson, moss & liverwort specialist. Bring portable lunch.

Monday 14 April
And so we say farewell to St John's Parish Hall ! The final meeting in the Society's temporary home before we move to the rebuilt Assembly House in September is the photographic group's annual show to the Society, this year on the theme of "Woodland Wonderland" (7.30pm). Group members are asked to let David Paull know what material they will have available.

Sunday 20 April
Full day walk round Reydon Marshes and surrounding woodland. Meet near Southwold water tower off the A1095 at 10.30 am, TM 503763. Leader Mike Poulton. Bring portable lunch.

Sunday 11 May
Morning field meeting at Tyrrell's Wood. Meet, at Woodland Trust car park at, 11.00 am, TM 205893. A felling licence was granted in 1986, despite part of the area being an SSSI. The Woodland Trust managed to buy the wood before felling was completed and saved many mature oaks and hornbeams. A rich mixed woodland. Leaders: Mary Cooper &. Carol Haines.

Wednesday 28 May
An informal morning walk on the North Burlingham Woodland Trails. Meet in car park by church at 11.00 am, TG 365101. The woods are owned and managed by Norfolk County Council. Different management regimes encourage a variety of wildlife. Hopefully Long Plantation will be carpeted with bluebells.

John Mott.

SOME MORE NORFOLK GALLS, PART 3

Andricus corruptrix was until recently a very rare gallwasp, closely related to *A. kollari* and *A. lignicola,* and causing similar, but very much smaller, hard and woody bud galls on Oak. When I first found it I was heard to remark "this looks like something extremely rare that we don't get in Norfolk, but it's probably something common gone wrong". I now have six West Norfolk localities, all from 1996, of something not seen in the county before, One of these records is from a tree I have examined for galls many times in the past without finding it, so I am sure it is a new arrival, and not just one we've missed before. A similar dramatic increase of this former rarity has been taking place in other counties, but the reason remains a matter for guesswork.

A particularly obscure and inconspicuous gall is caused by *Andricus quercuscorticis,* which galls the bark on the trunk of Oak trees, with clusters of larval cells in the wound callus where a branch has been removed, and I found it at two sites in 1996. The second one I found because I knew what to look for, but the first caught my eye because a pale splash on the tree trunk drew my attention to where birds had uncovered the galls and removed their tops in order to eat the larvae.

Rex Hancy found the first Norfolk galls of the Tephritid fly *Myopites inulaedyssentericae* on Fleabane in 1996, and following his advice I quickly found it to be in Heacham as well. It is a swelling of the capitulum, not visible until you dismantle the seedhead, but unlike some other Tephritid galls, the achenes do not become incorporated into the gall, so seed production is not affected (and the gall is harder to find). This is another former rarity, once confined to the south coast, that is on the increase, or perhaps we have only just learned how to find it.

The home of Dr. John Wells at Heacham, a mixture of barely tamed garden and natural woodland, is always productive when it comes to galls, and has added several firsts to the county list. It has now produced a gall so new that it doesn't even have a name yet, caused by an un-described mite, known also from Warwickshire, but apparently nowhere else. It causes a long upward roll on the margin of Willow leaves, immediately distinguished from similar galls, which all roll downwards.

After dismantling many catkins, I have finally succeeded in finding the tiny galls of the midge *Oligotrophus betulae* on Birch seeds. I was surprised to find, under the microscope, how large the larva is compared to the size of the seed it inhabits.

I noticed at Thompson Common that some buds on a Sallow bush were twice the size they should be, and remembering something about bud galls in my books, I took some home to check. I opened one, and found a very fat and agitated sawfly larva within, which confirmed it as the gall of *Euura mucronata (=saliceti).* Turning to the Royal Entomological Society Handbook to the adult sawflies I was surprised to find that this is "probably the commonest of British sawflies".

It is now becoming accepted that more of the leaf rolls caused by sawflies qualify as true galls, even though there is no associated thickening, and I can add from Heacham *Phyllocolpa scotaspis* (supposedly a northern species) on Osier, and *Parna tenella* on Lime.

Some new names come from species splits as our knowledge increases. For example, *marginemtorquens* (genus *Rhabdophaga* or *Dasineura,* take your pick) will no longer do for midges that roll *Salix* leaves. I am finding three members of this group with equal frequency, *auritae* (short rolls on Sallows), true *marginemtorquens* Long rolls on Osiers), and *roskami* (short rolls on Osiers, may need a different name, but we're calling them *roskami* for now). Leaf-rolling midges on violets, formerly *Dasineura affinis,* have now been split into three, and it seems the one I find regularly on Sweet violet should now be called *D. odoratae.* Note the importance of naming the host plant before assigning a name to the gall (midges are better botanists than we are).
Paul Cobb

THE SWARM

I remember that rather distant time as a summer of unbroken sunshine and days that were as long as a present-day week, with a countryside full of butterflies pursued avidly to add to the growing number in my collection. for those were the days of nets, killing jars and display cabinets. I was probably about eleven or twelve, which means that that gentle countryside, drowsy with summer heat, was poised on the threshold of war with all that this would mean in the caning years.

On that particular day I had followed my usual path to the open countryside that surrounded us. Down to the bottom of our garden, through a wicket gate, across a rough gravel path and into a tussocky field of rushes that, at the right time of the year, had Snipe nesting in it. Then any one of a number of trodden paths would lead out into arable fields that were small by todays standards and ringed by thick hedgerows that were allowed to grow tall, flower and set fruit. And as if this wasn't enough luxuriance, overhanging this bountiful scene were immense elms, many a hundred or more feet tall, with great limbs that reached far out from the edges of the fields where they stood. A scene we would drool over today – if we could find it!

Following familiar headlands and green lanes, and turning left or right as the whim took me, I wandered deep into this Hertfordshire countryside. The sounds of that still summer day were familiar to me, grasshoppers at my feet, birdsong overhead and perhaps the occasional clatter of a Wood Pigeon as it burst out of an over-thick hedgerow. Then there was something else, distant and indistinct. Not traffic noise, motor vehicles were few and far between and the nearest road was over a mile distant. A swarm of bees? no that wasn't right either, but something similar. As I walked on the sound seemed to swell until it began to fill the air and lose direction although I felt that it came from beyond a hedge a few yards ahead of me, and I began to feel a mixture of curiosity tinged with apprehension. Then as I stepped rather diffidently through a narrow gap in this hedge the volume suddenly doubled and I could see its source. Already made uneasy by the unknown I remember drawing back, frightened by what I had seen. The field, the whole field, every square yard of it was moving! A living heaving carpet of caterpillars. Large Whites in countless numbers, covering every plant, each of these reduced to no more than a skeleton of stems and tattered leaves. As this hoard ate, the noise of their jaws, each a minute whisper of sound, joined and blended into a huge and disturbing chorus that would swell and die and swell again, and they stank!

Their frass, sticky and green coated the plants, themselves, and the ground beneath, filling the still summer air with nauseous waves of mustard oil from the Brassicas they were consuming. For same moments I just stared, trying to compose myself. Telling myself that these were just the familiar caterpillars I had bred at home, from tiny yellow eggs to those beautiful whites that were a familiar sight around our vegetable patch. This was not some huge single living organism as it had almost appeared at my first frightened glance. Eventually I stepped forward slowly out of the shelter of the hedge and at the edge of the field began to count the number of caterpillars on the nearest plant, large and fat, and fully grown I judged. It was difficult, there were so many! and at about forty I gave up when I realised my shoes, socks and legs were becoming filthy with their green droppings. I don't think I stayed long. I still found this rippling moving scene very disconcerting and I remember feeling sick from the smell, but at the same time excited by what I had discovered.

On reaching home I was agog with the news of my find and very disappointed at the singular lack of interest shown by my parents. But then they were not very interested in the natural world. For one reason or another it was several days, it may have been as long as a week, before I returned to the 'Caterpillar Field' as I now called it. This time with my father rather reluctantly in tow, hoping, when he saw what I had to show him, he would be impressed. But I was to be disappointed, in those ensuing days they had gone, every single one of them. 'But there were millions!' I remember saying in protest at the empty scene. Now all that was left was a field of pale green stalks standing in what looked like bright green soil. 'What a mess' I remember my father saying, then muttering something about the farmer being 'pleased'.

Later I pondered on that remarkable scene I felt only I had witnessed. Where did all those eggs come from to produce that number of caterpillars? I thought of the source as a 'cloud' of large Whites, and I would picture a scene of them descending in a fluttering mass from a clear blue sky to stick their eggs over every leaf. Then there was the question, where did all those caterpillars go to? and I would be annoyed with myself, for I may have found the answer had my father and I not hurried away, and I wished that I had gone back there on my own. Were the chrysalis stuck onto those bare stalks and would we have seen them if we had looked closely?

Or had they retreated to the hedgerows to pupate? A search here may have answered that as well, but by the time these questions were framed in my mind it was far too late.

Over the years, from time to time, I have wondered about what I saw that day. There may well have been a migrating swarm of these butterflies tumbling across the countryside that chanced upon that field and congregated there to lay their eggs. I have no means of knowing how isolated that field was from others bearing a similar crop. Most probably it was isolated, and would then have a been a focus of attention. With egg and caterpillar numbers at that density they would have overwhelmed predators and parasites alike, beyond any control they could exert. Almost certainly, had I looked, many chrysalis would have been found amongst those bare stems that would have eventually been destroyed when the field was cleared. There is also little doubt the hedgerows would have been full of them as well, a fine feast for the winter birds, and small mammals too. Massed numbers also means disease and that too may have taken its toll, perhaps a massive one. Possibly from that countless swarm not more than average numbers would have made it to the adult stage. But I will never know.

Ivan West

DICRONOPALPUS RAMOSUS AGAIN!

Harvestmen I know little about and generally pass over them, promising myself I will get an identification guide one day, however two species that I saw recently stuck in my mind.

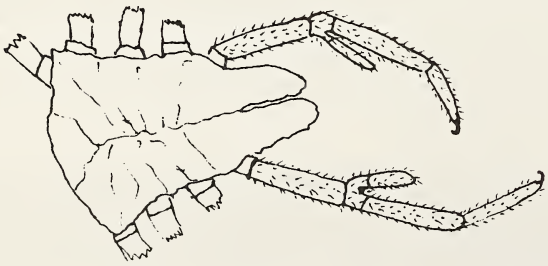
The first was a large bodied specimen with relatively thick short legs that ambled across our duvet one evening as my wife and I sat in bed drinking our bedtime cocoa.

The other I saw a day or two later between the double glazing of the sitting room window. Its body was small and round; about the size of a little orange lentil, while its legs were long and thin. It was this contrast that stuck in my mind rather than the possibility! of identifying either of them.

When I received the November 96 Natterjack the second paragraph of Colin Perry's article on *Dicronopalpus ramosus* caught. my eye and I rushed to the window to see If 'my' harvestman was still there. I surveyed the gap between the two panes and found a crumpled body with long legs suspended in an old cobweb halfway up one side of the frame. Got by a spider and useless for identification, I presumed, as I pulled it free.

However under the microscope I could see that it was, in fact, a cast skin and the main identification features of *Dicronopalpus ramosus*, the palps, were clearly visible. Even without the microscope the forked second section of the three part pedipalps could be seen clearly.

I can, therefore add a new (fourth) locality, Wacton, for this harvestmen and, for those who did not get a guide to harvestmen for Christmas, some indications of this species' physical attributes in the hope that other members will look for this creature and send records of its sightings to the County Recorder – Mr R Jones, 14 Post Office Road, Dersingham, King's Lynn PE31 6HP, for inclusion in the Wildlife-2000 project.



Body 3-5mm in diameter; legs 50mm, thin, almost hair-like; Pedipalps 3 segments each 2mm long, spur on inside of 2nd segment 1mm long.

Drawing 19.12.96 from cast skin.

Robert Maidstone.

MINES A MINER

It all started when I noticed a mine in the leaf of Ground Elder *Aegopodium podagraria* in my garden. This plant, defying drought, flood and pestilence, flourishes mightily and this discovery left me with mixed feelings. I had always seen Ground Elder as occupying the debit side of the garden account, being of no value and much nuisance. But here was some form of life that ctually found it useful – it could be eaten.

A look at the index to the life history chart in The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland Vol. 7(2) told me that Ground Elder leaves are not mined by any lepidoptera species. By a logical process of deduction concluded that it must be something else. But what?

After a while there floated up to the surface of my recollection a memory that I had once found a mine in a Silver Birch leaf that turned out not to be *Nepticulidae* (Lepidoptera) but *Agromyzidae* (Diptera). Could it be that my Ground Elder collier could be from the same stable? (If you think my metaphor is mixed, remember pit ponies!).

Having bought a copy of the RES Handbook on the Agromyzidae I was gratified to find that one of their number, *Phytomyza obscurella,* does indeed mine in Ground Elder and my mine fitted the description. Not only that. There are some 300 other members of the family whose larvae mine a wide variety of plants.

By now, my appetite thoroughly whetted, I was looking for non-lepidoptera mines in other plants and I started to find them. Why had I not noticed them before? Here is a list, together with my identification of the miner:

Red Campion	(Silene dioica)	Amauromyza flavifrons
Black Knapweed	(Centaurea nigra)	Liriomyza centaureae
Ornamental Cabbage	(Brassica sp.)	Phytomyza horticola
Coltness Dahlia		P. horticola
Holly	(Ilex aquifolium)	P. ilicis
Aquilegia	(Aquilegia sp.)	P. miniscula
Smooth Sow-thistle	(Sonchus oleraceus)	?P. syngenesiae
At other locations I have noted:		
Silver Birch	(Betula pendula)	Agromyza alnibetulae
Nettle	(Urtica dioica)	A. reptans
Honeysuckle	(Lonicera periclymenum)	Paraphytomyza lonicerae
Creeping Thistle	(Cirsium arvense)	Phytomyza autumnalis
Hogweed	(Heracleum sphondylium)	P. heracleana

Before I started on this quest I had no idea that all these existed. Mines can yield nuggets indeed!

Roland Rogers.

1995 BIRD AND MAMMAL REPORT

The Editors and members of the Publications Committee regret the delay in the publication of the 1995 Bird and Mammal Report. The preparation by the Norfolk Bird Club of the much enhanced classified list of species appearing in the bird section, has proved to be a formidable task and has taken longer than expected.

We are actively looking at ways to assist the Club with the workload involved in recording and editing the data which forms the basis of the annual list of species. It is our aim to return to the long established practice of publishing future issues of the Report in the year following that to which they relate.

Don Dorling.

CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE NEXT NATTERJACK (MAY) should be sent to Colin Dack 12, Shipdham Road, Toftwood, Dereham, Norfolk. NR19 1JJ. To arrive not later than 1st April 1997. Contributions arriving after this date will not be accepted for the May Natterjack. Remember I do need copy in good time as the Programme goes out with the May Natterjack.

Catherine Gurney

The Society has lost one of its oldest members, Miss Catherine Gurney who died on 7th January at the grand age of 90 years. She became a member in 1933 and took a wide interest in Natural History and also the Scout movement.

She lived the latter half of her life at Ingham near Stalham in a house built by her naturalist relation Dr. Robert Gurney in 1906 the year she was born. Older members will remember her after the war when she attended our field meetings always accompanied with her little dog called Streaker. Although her sight and health were failing in recent years her memory and interest never failed.

Her distant cousin Dr. Richard Hamond represented the Society at her funeral.

Ken Durrant.

AT THE NEST

I can now scan in slides so if you want to stop me putting them in Natterjack get writing to fill the space.

Colin Dack.