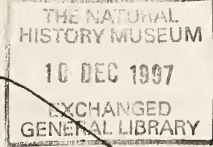




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THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK



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The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

1998 Programme

All evening talks will be held in the Pierce Room, The Assembly House, Theatre Street, Norwich at 1930 hrs. There is some car parking behind the Assembly House at 40 pence after 1730 hrs and more in front and side at 60 pence after 1830 hrs. The society meetings are always on the second Tuesday in each month, the Photographic Group meetings on the fourth Monday. If you require coffee before or after the meetings there is the Oliver Mussell bar at the back of the foyer which sells coffee at 75 pence a cup up to 2230 hrs.

Tuesday 13 January

Presidential Address: 'Death in the Wild - All Doom and Gloom?', an illustrated talk by Dr Ian Keymer. Previously Dr Keymer worked at the Veterinary Investigation Centre in Norwich specialising in wild animals; now a freelance specialist in Zoo and Wildlife Medicine.

Sunday 18 January

Field meeting at Hunstanton cliffs for birds. Meet at north end of promenade near lighthouse, TF 675418 at 1030 hrs. Wrap up well! Leader: Mike Poulton.

Tuesday 10 February

'Conchology. The World of Shells', a talk by Daphne Howlett who will describe her collection of shells, how it started and how it grew. She will take a look at land and fresh water shells (using local material) and a general look at sea shells, using items from her display to illustrate the talk.

Sunday 15 February

Field meeting at Cockthorpe Common and Stiffkey mainly for birds. Meet at Cockthorpe village, TF 983422 at 1030 hrs. Leader: Charles Neale.

Monday 23 February

'Plant photography for publication', an illustrated talk by Dr Stephen Martin, an amateur plant photographer, alpine gardener, former City College English Lecturer and author of the recent *Wild Flowers of East Anglia* about his mixed experiences in providing flower pictures for books, periodicals, natural history picture libraries and photographic competitions.

John Mott

BEHAVIOUR OF THE DADDY LONGS LEGS SPIDER(*Pholcus phalangoides*)

W.S.Bristowe in his book on Spiders (New Naturalist's Series 1958 'The World of Spiders'), states that, after mating, the male Daddy Long Legs Spider leaves the female's web quickly, but this does not always appear to be the case. When my daughter and her family started decorating a cottage at Shipdham this summer, prior to moving in, the cottage having been unoccupied for two years, they discovered a thriving colony of this species in the downstairs rooms. This was in mid-August. Most of the spiders had to find new homes for themselves, but one pair with an egg sac were carefully moved upstairs and put in the corner of the ceiling beside a beam. Unfortunately the egg sac did not survive the move. The female quickly spun a new web and within a day or so had a new egg sac dangling from her chelicerae, and the male had taken up his position beside the female, but about 2 inches away, and both facing in the same direction. The night after the new eggs had been laid, the two spiders were seen facing each other and touching each other with their front legs, though no actual mating had been witnessed.

After about two weeks, the female left the egg sac and moved to another beam, where the male visited her several times. After a week, the female returned to her web and resumed her position guarding the egg sac and the male resumed his vigil two inches away. The young hatched after four weeks, about mid-September, and for two days nothing further happened. The male then disappeared.

The next night, the female was hunched over his corpse and spent the next 36 hours sucking out his juices, and enlarging her own shrunken figure into the bargain. She then carefully wrapped his husk in a net of silk and dropped it onto the dressing table. The baby spiders stayed with the mother until October 9th when all started to disperse and commenced spinning their own little webs.

Alec Bull

WELLS SALTMARSH 19TH JULY 1997

Some 15 members met at Wells Field Study Centre, led by Paul Banham, former Warden of the Centre (1969 – 89). The morning was spent on the nearest accessible marsh, which lies within Wells parish. Mid-July sees saltmarsh flora at its most colourful. Common Sea Lavender is in full flower, accompanied by Sea Spurrey, Sea Purslane and Sea Plantain. Thrift has mainly finished, while Sea Aster is yet to come.

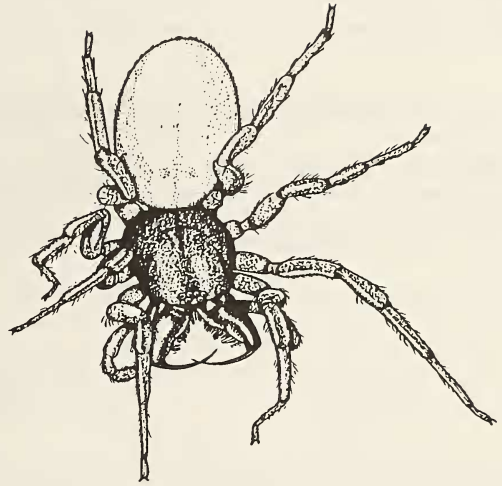
Some members tasted Marsh Samphire (raw) for the first time; even the rather tough perennial species (*Sarcocornia perennis*) was tried. Several other of this complicated group of species occur on this marsh, but cannot accurately be sorted out until they flower in late summer and autumn. One of the few saltmarsh fungi (a rust, *Uromyces limonii*) was found, its bright orange clusters showing up well on the underside of Sea Lavender leaves. One patch of a closely related species (*U. chenopodii*, det. Reg. Evans) was also spotted on a plant of Annual Seablite.

The afternoon session was at the Field Study Centre, at the kind invitation of the Director, Christine West. Members were able to inspect the facilities and use equipment, notably stereo microscopes to examine specimens brought back from the marsh. Paul brought the proceedings to a close by showing his saltmarsh film made in 1976, which includes time-lapse sequences of the marsh being uncovered and, finally, covered again by a spring tide.

Paul Banham

ARACHNOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

Is it because all British spiders, with the exception of two species in the family *Uloboridae*, are in possession of poison fangs that some people loathe them so much? Or could it be the scuttling, black, hairy presence of some house dwelling species that revolts the human imagination? I can understand the fear that some people have of spiders but I believe it to be an unreasoned barrier to the study of and interest in this group of invertebrates. This is a great shame, for both young and old could gain such pleasure from studying them. They occur almost everywhere and one does not have to travel far to find many fascinating species.



Dysdera crocata

Yes, it is true that several British spiders will bite you. However none will do this unless really badly handled or seriously provoked. Even then the bite of the worst of them is less painful and more insignificant than a wasp sting. The water spider, *Argyroneta aquatica* bites if provoked. So does *Scotophaeus blackwalli*. This is the greasy looking, black, clinging spider which you find in your underpants if you leave them on the floor overnight!

The Garden Spider, *Araneus diadematus* bites flower arrangers who crush it when arranging the flowers which were once its home. In my experience this is the spider which most commonly bites people in this country. Its bite is slightly painful and causes redness and a very small swelling.

Tegenaria duellica, the long-legged House Spider is another species that can get into our clothing. It will bite you only if you panic when you find it between your skin and shirt and attempt to crush it. Well, wouldn't you? My six year old daughter handles these spiders with confidence, both in their pacifist nature and her gentleness.

I have been bitten by the little Zebra Spider, *Salticus scenicus* of sun soaked walls. I was only six then and had tender skin and probing fingers!

The one spider I will never "mess with" is *Dysdera crocata*. This is the slow-moving, large spider found under logs or in soil whilst digging in the garden. It has a red, orange cephalothorax and legs with a grey or cream unmarked abdomen. Its fangs are huge! They are designed for penetrating the armour of woodlice and other small crustaceans. It is very aggressive!

A friend of mine described camping on the coast of Denmark and being bitten by spiders, which, by description were *Dysdera*. His legs swelled painfully and the Danish doctor who treated him was clearly familiar with "the red spiders". This species thrives along the coastline under driftwood where it feeds on Sandhoppers (family *Talitridae*) which are extremely juicy!

If one mistreats a dog it may bite you. Many animals are prepared and equipped to defend themselves

against interference. Spiders are no exception. Like all our fellow species on this Earth they should be treated with respect. This is their right and they deserve it.

Garth M. Coupland.

REMINISCENCES OF GREAT, GREEN BUSH CRICKETS

During the 1950's I lived at Reedham. Like most children I was intensely inquisitive and therefore desired to know what creature made that glorious, loud, undulating, continuous, singing sound from the high grass and bushes around the village. By homing in on the sound with my ears I discovered *Tettigonia viridissima* males, vivid green, huge and fascinating, perfectly camouflaged amongst the herbage.



Tettigonia viridissima
Male, Reedham
July 28th 1997

They are very sensitive to sound and movement. Stalking one can be quite time consuming. They always stop singing just as you get close and you have to wait, stock still for as much as five minutes before they start up again. They will also move round to the side of the plant facing away from your approach. I have noticed that the sound of a passing car will induce these insects to sing.

T. viridissima has always occupied a special place in my heart, possibly because its singing evokes memories of long, hot August days and warm, windy night during summer holidays. This is the time of year when the insects become adult and start their serenading to the females. I have only seen two females. Being silent, it is only luck that brings you in contact with one, with her sword-like ovipositor at the rear.

In my experience the males will not sing in cool weather, rain, or much before midday.

Nearly every year since leaving Reedham in the early 1960's I have made an annual pilgrimage to the old sites to hear the Bush Crickets singing. Recently my young children have accompanied me and delight in repeating my childhood hunting techniques and being rewarded with the sight of this magnificent insect. As I used to, we capture one and take it home where it will sing all night in the house, soothing the family to sleep. We feed it earthworms which it devours ferociously. We then return it to the same spot where we found it after a few days of observations.

This year I first heard it singing on 27th July, my earliest recording yet. Speaking of recording, I have failed to ever capture the song on tape. Even when a microphone is placed directly above the insect the sound is too high pitched for conventional equipment.

I presume that *T. viridissima* occurs at Reedham as it represents the last remnant of sandy coastline from prehistoric times. Its distribution in the village is extremely precise and local. It does not occur anywhere else, to my knowledge, other than the centre of Reedham. The southern boundary is the River Yare with marshes beyond. North of Church Road is farmland and the eastern and western boundaries are grazing marshes.

It seems to prefer long grass and thick herbage or bramble patches in the drier parts of the village. I have found it on common reed by the river and around dykes which are close to its drier locations. I have found it in oak trees. It will move from a permanent habitat such as an undisturbed hedge or bank and populate nearby "weed" growing in a field left fallow. I have not noticed that it has any preference for any particular plant on which to sit.

It was therefore with some surprise that I learned from David Richmond that *T. viridissima* had not been recorded in Norfolk since 1961 and was thought to possibly be extinct in the County. Wildlife 2000 has prompted me to start submitting records and therefore is directly responsible for the Great Green Bush Cricket being placed firmly back amongst the fauna of our County.

Science has helped me to learn so much about our Natural History and by submitting records a naturalist can go some way towards repaying his or her debt to science. I would urge all naturalists to submit their records and make Wildlife 2000 the success it deserves to be.

Garth. M. Coupland.

"LUNCH BREAK" AT WHEATFEN

It was a warm and sunny day with a fresh to strong breeze; having decided to have "lunch" at Wheatfen Reserve, I made my way down the board-walk to where the boats were moored.

A male Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) rose above the scrub showing his plumage to full effect, he then rose swiftly towards the sun and joined another Marsh Harrier high in the sky and the two of them cavorted playfully before drifting away out of sight; leaving me surrounded by numbers of different species of insects and the hidden calls of unseen bird species.

Sitting on the board-walk eating my sandwiches, I was joined by a Comma (*Polygonia c-album*) and a Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*), the latter resting briefly on my forearm; on my legs, Common Darters (*Sympetrum striolatum*) sunbathed and did not seem unduly disturbed by my movements. Hawker species such as Migrant (*Aeshna mixta*), Southern (*Aeshna cyanea*) and Brown (*Aeshna grandis*) patrolled their respective territories doubtlessly "shopping for lunch".

One small persistent and irritating insect buzzed around my head but owing to the close proximity of a Brown Hawker I was reluctant to brush it away. To my surprise, the dragonfly then flew directly towards my face taking the offending insect just in front of my completely crossed eyes, and settling on the undergrowth in front of me proceeded to have his "lunch". I should have tried to make a clinical assessment of the identity of the unfortunate victim but in reality I could only sit and watch in awe and amazement.

At this point I was joined by a black and white cat of the domestic species, who encouraged by my welcoming tone solicited for attention; realising no food remained disappeared briefly and returned with a freshly-killed, headless rodent corpse, identification of which I did not attempt; and proceeded to have her "lunch".

In an effort to retain the food I had eaten, I finished my "lunch-break", leaving my 'compatriots' to continue with theirs, each in their own inimitable manner.

Eunice Phipps 17/09/97

OBSERVATION

On Sunday 31st August at Cley I observed a pair of Moorhens feeding their two young on Small Tortoiseshell butterflies. I had never before seen Moorhen feeding insects to their young. I had only ever seen them feeding their young on vegetable food.

Colin Dack.

Please send items for Febuary Natterjack before 1st January 1998 to Colin Dack
12, Shipdham Road, Toftwood, Dereham, Norfolk. NR19 1JJ.