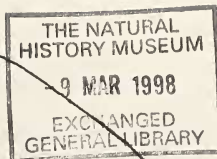


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Number 60

THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK



February 1998

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

1998 PROGRAMME

Just a few extra notes about some of the future meetings. Please see the yellow programme for full details.

Tuesday 10 March

Annual General Meeting followed by 'Gorillas in the Moss', an illustrated talk by Robin Stevenson. Robin was part of a six man team of bryologists who visited Uganda in 1996. He will be talking about their visit to Bwindi Forest in the SW corner of Uganda adjacent to Ruanda.

Wednesday 25 March

Morning field meeting at Attlebridge mainly for birds. Meet in Marriott's Way car park TG 128176 at 1100 hrs. Leader: John Butcher. Exploring another section of Marriott's Way and its bird life, hopefully well away from Costessey High School's sponsored walks!

Sunday 17 May

Full day field meeting at Winterton Dunes. Meet in Winterton beach car park (a small parking fee is charged), through village on Beach Road, TG 499198 at 1100 hrs. Leader: Rick Southwood of English Nature, who will give a guided walk for about two hours. If you take a portable lunch you can eat it at the northern end of the reserve instead of walking back to the car park and then explore further in the afternoon.

John Mott.

WEB OF WILDLIFE

The Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society now has some World Wide Web pages. This is just short basic information on the society with details of our programme and a link to the Wildlife 2000 project, which, hopefully, will be expanded in the coming months.

I realise that this 'web pages' and 'URLs' will mean very little to some, but this is a media - often called 'electronic publishing' - that promises to be as prominent in the future as newspapers, magazines and books are now. All a web page is in reality is text and pictures held on a computer, that anyone with a compatible computer, a telephone line and certain computer programmes, can access and look at, from anywhere in the world, at any time of the day or night. So for those who are interested, and have the right "kit" please do have a look at the N.N.N. Society Home Page at: -

<http://www.paston.co.uk/users/golds/nnnshome.html>

and perhaps follow the 'links'. These will take you to the Norfolk Bat Group pages, the Norfolk Wildlife Web and other sites. Comments always welcome -either by phone call, letter - or even e-mail

- In my case its: john.golds@paston.co.uk or jgg.ncnw@paston.co.uk

John Goldsmith

TRANSATLANTIC FROG

On the 4th of February 1997 I received a call from Safeways super market Cromer. A friend working there had found a small frog on the bananas which were said to have come from Trinidad. I was asked if it possibly was one of the poison arrow frogs. When told that it was approximately 3 cms long, light tan coloured with dark stripes down its back, I said that it was possibly a tree frog. I received it later in an ice-cream container.

I soon found a home for it in one of my empty caterpillar breeding cages. Putting some sprigs of shrubs in a small jar and standing it in a flowerpot saucer filled with rain water, I released the frog into the cage. As soon as it saw the water it dived in and was obviously enjoying its new home.

Next morning it was still submerged, except for its eyes and nostrils, but in February what was I going to feed it on? Fortunately I had a culture of *Drosophila* fruit flies being reared on some rather high bananas. These were gladly accepted and kept it alive for a number of weeks. I eventually used up all my culture but as the weather improved I could catch other flies and caterpillars in the garden.



As soon as I lifted up the front glass of the cage it knew the dinner was being served. I would release the fly or caterpillar close the glass and stand back. It would lift up its head whether in the water or on top of the jar containing the plants and with a flop would leap up onto the glass near its prey and at the same time flick out its tongue to capture it then with a gulp it would be gone. Flies as large as Bluebottles were also taken.

It was strange seeing it run up the glass to take a caterpillar which disappeared in two or three gulps. On December 5th when I went to feed it I found it sitting up the corner of the cage dead. I had lost my pet of 10 months.

Dr. B.T. Clark of the Zoology Dept. British museum kindly supplied its name. Like most natural history species its name has changed over the years. It was previously known as *Oolygon rubra* or *Hyla rubra* but is now called *Seinax rubra*. Apparently it is quite common in the southern Caribbean, eastern Panama, Amazon basin and coastal regions of South America. He remarked that its survival was most creditable after such a journey.

Ken Durrant.

THE INVADERS

I have in my garden several *Pyracantha* shrubs, some of which are growing on trellis up various walls. While giving them all a light trim during July 97 I noticed one of them, an orange berried variety, was looking very sorry for itself. It had not many leaves at all and those that remained looked very tatty.

On closer inspection I was surprised to find that the whole shrub was covered with caterpillars. These were busy chomping away at the leaves from the bottom to the top. I have been growing this shrub for 30 years or more and have never known this kind of problem before. On consulting my books I found the culprit was the caterpillar of the Vapourer Moth. The four little tufts of hair on the back give them a 'toothbrush' look. Several were later found indoors having got in through an open window.

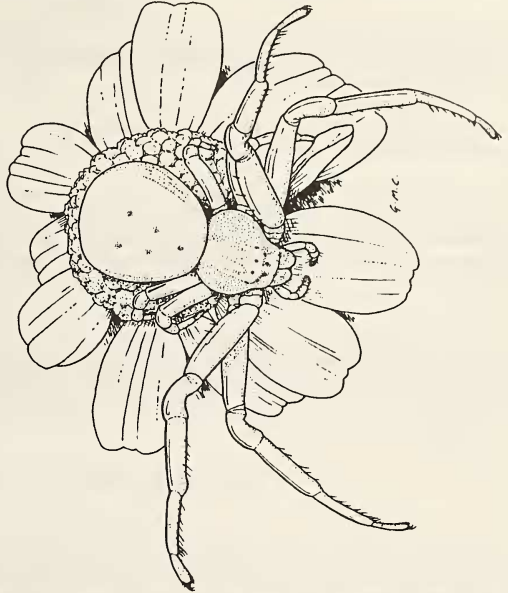
The shrub did recover by putting out new leaves and by the year's end no damage was visible.

Tony Howes. November 1997

ARACHNOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

I have never had any problems with my camera until I met with *Misumena vatia*. I took several photographs of this beautiful spider and released her, confident in my abilities as a photographer. Unfortunately all the slides failed, being either over exposed or wholly blacked out. The rest of the film was perfectly normal. I will continue this story after a description of this species, one of Britain's most unusual spiders.

Misumena vatia is a crab spider of the family *Thomisidae*. As with many members of the family there is great disparity between the sexes. The females are quite large, up to 11 mm, and are commonly all white with a plump, rounded, triangular abdomen. Some specimens may be varying shades of yellow and often individuals of both colours have a red line along each side of the abdomen. This colouring creates a perfect camouflage as the spider sits waiting on flowers for its prey. White spiders are found on Ox eye Daisy, Cow Parsley, Guelder Rose, Yarrow, and Knapweed which has white parts to the otherwise purple flower head which the spider's legs mimic to perfection. Buttercups and Dandelions are favoured by yellow individuals.



The male spider is half the size of the female. He has dark brown legs and cephalothorax and a patterned abdomen. He has no similarity in size or colouration to the female so one has to learn to recognise him separately.

The females on their scented death traps sit, motionless, patiently waiting with the front two pairs of legs outstretched. When an insect arrives to feed, the legs suddenly grasp it and the spider's exceptionally toxic venom kills quickly. Bumblebees and large butterflies are regularly taken by mature females.

I have yet to observe the hunting technique of the males. They are not so easy to find although females can be common in the right habitat, which is generally undisturbed banks, woods and commons. A clue to how males behave may be found in the technique employed by the brown cousin of *Misumena*, The common crab spider *Xysticus cristatus*. I have observed many times this spider curling a white ray floret over itself to disguise its obvious presence on Ox eye Daisies as it sits close to the yellow inner disc florets.

A characteristic of these spiders is that they suck their prey dry without chewing. This leaves a perfect but empty chitinous husk ideal for the student of *Diptera* species to mount !

Various books describe the female's ability to change colour from white to yellow if placed on a yellow background or in a jar surrounded by yellow film. My experiments have not succeeded in producing this result. I wonder if sexual maturity may bring on this ability as it would enable the egg growing female to have a greater choice of feeding sites ?

Another intriguing question is how do these spiders know which stems to climb and when, in order to reach a suitable white flower? Evolution must have finely tuned their senses to their environment to enable this precise match to be constantly achieved rather than happening by chance. Or could the spiders be actively aware of themselves and their relationship with their surroundings. I would like to believe the latter!

Dr. Bill Abel brought me my second specimen from his garden off Newmarket Road in Norwich. I took five photographs of her, all of which returned with the slides wholly blacked out. The other slides in the film were normal. I was becoming slightly "spooked" by this. The same phenomena occurred with three more films and I became exceedingly "spooked" and let the ghostly white creature have its freedom. I have had no further problems with my camera and later achieved a fine photograph of a red striped individual from Suffolk.

I cannot explain what happened but feel their must be a logical solution. However it remains a perplexing mystery of photography.

Garth. M. Coupland.

NATURE MISCELLANY

During November I found caterpillars of the Large White Butterfly on the Broccoli in my garden. I was very surprised to find 10 on 1st December and 7 on the 8th.

I was fortunate to see a late House Martin, my latest ever in fact, on 17th November over the Close where I live at New Costessey. It was a very pleasant surprise.

On 6th November at Cley Beach car park, whilst eating my sandwiches in the car, I noticed that one of the many Black Headed Gulls present had some coloured rings on its legs. Shortly after, when I had finished eating, I searched amongst the gulls with my telescope and found the bird in question sitting near the top of the shingle bank. I was able to move in close without disturbing it to obtain the full details required. There was also a B.T.O. ring on its left leg and I was able to read just one number, a 3.

I promptly wrote to the B.T.O. at Thetford to report my find and surprisingly, in view of past experience, I received a reply by return. However disappointment reigns as it was merely an acknowledgement stating they are currently endeavouring to reduce a very large backlog and it will be many months before I receive details. Watch this space !!

John Butcher.

GREEN WOODPECKERS FROM THE GARDEN

Ever since I moved to my present address I have had the pleasure of having Green Woodpeckers for neighbours. The woodlands are close to the garden and all through spring and summer the laughing call of this lovely bird can be heard. They are often seen as they fly from one group of trees to another with their unmistakable undulating flight.

One nest this year was hollowed out of a poplar tree about 25ft up in the main trunk. The youngsters left the nest in June but stayed in the general area. They were often on the ground, especially on the wide grass verge outside the front garden-ants were the probable attraction.

I enjoy the company of these 'Yaffles', my gardening would be less pleasant without them and their joyous 'singing'.

Tony Howes. November 1997

A QUESTION OF NUMBERS

I was in a friend's garden involved in some frantic head-in-a-hedge spider hunting when they idly asked me "why does insect abundance peak in the summer whilst for spiders it peaks in autumn? "

I was stumped. Can anyone help me with an answer ? Here are my ideas so far:

There seems to be two questions here -

i) How is abundance gauged ?

There are at least three measures: number of species, number of individuals, biomass.

I would guess that what we commonly notice as "abundance" is due to the number of individuals above a certain size (since large spiders are more striking) and degree of activity, whether in the air (like the migrating money spiders or *Linyphiidae*) on webs, or on the ground (like the fast-moving wolf spiders or *Lycosidae*)

ii) Are there really more mature adult individuals in the autumn and why?

a) Yes. Because spiders are predators, so are higher up the food chain and thus their numbers lag behind those of their insect prey.

b) Yes. Spiders generally take longer than insects to reach maturity because they have no fast-growing larval

stage so instead go through a series of moults . (Up to 8 in a female *A. diadematus* according to W.S. Bristowe).
c) No. We only notice the spiders like *A. diadematus* and *Zygiella x-notata* that are clogging our garden paths and windows with extravagantly extended webs. Whilst these species peak in the autumn, others unobtrusively peak earlier, and all but the most observant among us fail to notice. Insects on the other hand tend to be more obvious, buzzing.

The third option seems the most likely but I await ideas from someone more informed than myself. The only data I have found is in Bristowe (1958, p258) where he says that density of *Linyphiidae* in a field near Bexhill varied from 400 000 per acre in February to "over 1 000 000 from August to December".

Lawrence Bradby.

FUNGI REPORT

This year has some same interesting finds, amongst the more interesting are *Inonotus dryadeus* (at the base of an oak tree), *Cortinarius violaceus* and *Sparassis crispa* on a pine stump. *Stropharia aurantiaca* described by Roger Phillips and others as rare has been found by myself on no fewer than five occasions, all within the environs of Norwich.

A find of particular interest has been the collection of a specimen of *Geastrum pectinatum* from a hedgebank on Ipswich Road. Only one of a handful of finds in Norfolk.

It is particularly interesting to note that this find was from the same hedgebank and almost the exact spot that I found the VERY RARE fungus (mentioned in EDP re road widening on Nov. 7th) *Battarea phalloides* in August 1996. This fungus now totals 42 specimens-up from only 3 in 1996. It is hoped that this site which is of obvious importance will not suffer any ill effects.

Trevor Dove.

PHYLLIS ELLIS, M.B.E.

Phyllis Ellis was presented with the Sydney Long Memorial Medal at the annual meeting of the Norfolk Wildlife Trust as a well-deserved recognition of her part in the establishment of the Ted Ellis nature reserve at Wheatfen over the past decade.

The award is made jointly by the Society and the Trust about every two years to a naturalist who has made a distinguished contribution to the conservation of Norfolk's wildlife.

Phyllis received the medal and citation from the Trust president, Sir John Blofeld, but declared, with what one might call robust modesty, that she did not deserve it because, unlike previous recipients, she had done no original research, a caveat that she had insisted should be included in the wording of the citation.

But the citation nonetheless made it clear why the Society and the Trust felt she was a worthy recipient. It spoke of her "pivotal role" in the formation of the Ted Ellis Trust and the creation of the reserve.

Anyone who has had anything to do with Wheatfen knows that she has played an invaluable part in the preservation and conservation of that unique corner of Norfolk. She is what in modern parlance would be known as a facilitator. She makes things happen. In her booklet recording the history of the first ten years of the Ted Ellis Trust, she writes: "I only pushed from the back and made loud noises in front." Without that impetus, Wheatfen could have been lost.

The first medal – which honours the memory of the Society's former secretary, Dr Sydney Long, who with his friends founded the Trust as guardian of Cley Marsh was awarded to Dr Ted Ellis. Sadly, he died before it could be presented but he knew that the decision had been made that he should be the first to be accorded the honour.

The other recipients of the medal are Christopher Cadbury, Ken Durrant, Michael Seago and Dr. Martin George.

David Paull.

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

THE GARDEN POND

The smaller of the two ponds in my garden has always given myself and my family lots of pleasure. It is only 7' by 4' and is surrounded by conifers on three sides. It used to hold goldfish but the annual invasion by frogs made life rather uncomfortable for them so the fish were put elsewhere.

Nowadays it is home to the frogs, newts and other water dwellers. Each spring several Large Red damsel flies (*Pyrhosoma nymphula*) and Blue Tailed (*Ischnura elegans*) hatch from this small pond but it is the frogs that give the most pleasure. During the spring the adults come in from the surrounding areas of garden and usually the first spawn is seen by mid March, the water is now churned up in their frenzy to mate. By early summer things have settled down again, the tadpoles are there in hundreds. The adult frogs can be enticed out on to pool edging by dangling a worm over the side, certain individuals get quite tame. This year (97) it is interesting to note that there are still tadpoles (without legs showing) swimming about in November.

My grandchildren still laughingly remember an incident of two summers ago when we were picnicking on the lawn. An adult frog appeared on the lawn and promptly jumped into a cup!

Tony Howes November 1997

Hunstanton / Titchwell 18th January

Seven intrepid members arrived at Hunstanton on a very wet morning. The sight of several Turnstone on the grass at the top of the cliffs indicated that the tide was well in. Whilst waiting for possible late arrivals we did check whether any birds could be seen from the cliff top, but, apart from a number of Fulmars, it was obvious that we should see very little in the murky conditions. It was agreed that we should move on to Titchwell where at least we got wet less quickly. Despite the depressing weather we had a very successful visit before going home at about 14 00. In all we recorded 66 species among which the highlights were; Shore Lark (c 14), Twite, Little Egret (2), Eider, Black-winged Stilt and Slavonian Grebe (2). It was particularly pleasing to see the latter at close quarters, from the path, and to compare the species with the nearby Little Grebe. Six of us, including the leader, are grateful to Eunice for spotting so many of the species and pointing them out to us. I am sure that without her eagle eyes we would have missed some of them.

Michael Poulton .



Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*
Winter and Summer plumage

