



Number 61

THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK



May 1998

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

1998 PROGRAMME

With this issue of Natterjack you will receive the programme card for the following 12 months. We have started a month earlier than in the past to make it easier for the Norwich branch of the Norfolk Wildlife Trust (NWT), the RSPB and ourselves to prevent clashes of dates. The purpose of these notes is to expand the details of some of the meetings where lack of space precludes it on the card.

Sunday 17th May

Details in last Natterjack.

Wednesday 3rd June

Marston Marsh is a Norwich Local Nature Reserve in the River Yare valley, south of Norwich between the A140 and the A11. This marsh, with its network of dykes, is grazed by cattle during the summer. The car park is on Marston Lane off the A140 opposite the Post House Hotel. It is small so suggest sharing cars if possible. TG 217057.

Sunday 14th June

Ashwellthorpe Lower Wood is an NWT Reserve. It is ancient semi-natural woodland on boulder clay. Trees include alder, ash, oak, hazel, hornbeam, field maple, holly, elm, hawthorn and blackthorn. Shrubs include dogwood, guelder rose and spindle.

Parking is in the Warden's meadow, just past a wood yard in the middle of the village. Do not try to use the old entrance. TM 142977.

We plan to visit again in September and April to see the woods throughout the seasons.

Sunday 28th June

Hickling Broad is a National Nature Reserve as well as an NWT Reserve. It has a large broad, fen, dykes, scrape and grazing marsh. Good for swallowtail butterflies, dragonflies and a good range of plants and birds. Toilets available.

This is one of two meetings associated with Wildlife 2000. Several parties will head off in different directions. Come and see recorders in action and follow your own interests. It will be an enjoyable day.

Follow the brown tourist signs from Hickling. The reserve entrance is in 3 km. TG 428222.

Sunday 5th July

Buxton Heath Open Day, 1030 hrs to 1630 hrs. Everybody welcome. Car park at TG 173214, on Heath Road off B1149. Go down narrow track to left opposite first house.

Tuesday 21st July

This indoor meeting and the field meeting on 30th August are to introduce members to wading birds. You don't have to attend both but I think you would find it useful. This is an extra indoor meeting. We have been fortunate, due to some skilful negotiating by your Programme Secretary, in getting the Music Room at no extra cost, so come and see this magnificent room.



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Sunday 26th July

Upton Fen is an NWT Reserve and is one of the finest open fens with dykes, pools and woodland in the county. Good for swallowtails, dragonflies, round leaved wintergreen, sedges and bryophytes. Upton Fen is 1.5 km east of South Walsham. Take minor road through Pilson Green to Low Farm. Car park on right. TG 379137.

This is a joint meeting with our colleagues of the Great Yarmouth Naturalists' Society.

Sunday 16th August

Chippenham Fen is a National Nature Reserve. It is a Breckland valley fen just off the A11, just before it joins the A14 Newmarket by-pass, and includes old peat diggings, unimproved wet meadows and old planted woodlands. Meet at TL 652692. Leave A11 at junction with B 1085, signed Chippenham, just before the junction with the Newmarket bypass. This is the old A11 through Red Lodge which crosses over the A11 east of Chippenham. Turn left in Chippenham and at tee junction turn right into track. Park at side of track between Park Farm and reserve after Phantom Cottages.

Sunday 23rd August

Thompson Common, an NWT Reserve, consists of pingoes, grassland and woods.

This is one of two meetings associated with Wildlife 2000. Several parties will head off in different directions. Come and see recorders in action and follow your own interests. It will be an enjoyable day.

The car park is at TL 943967. Leave Watton on the A1075 Thetford road and travel for about 8 km. The car park is on the right behind a large lay-by on the line of an old railway. If you come to the village of Stow Bedon you have gone too far.

Sunday 30th August

Titchwell is an RSPB Reserve with a large car park for which there is a charge of £3 if you are not a member. This is a follow-on from the indoor meeting on 21st July. TF 750438. Toilets available.

John Mott

MAGPIES FEEDING ON MUNTJAC CORPSE

On Sunday 1st February 1998, whilst travelling to Wroxham along the A1062 through the village of Horning, I saw two Magpies *Pica pica*, fly away from a large mammal corpse in a winter wheat field three metres from the road edge. On stopping the car to investigate I was amazed to see that the Magpies were feeding on a dead Muntjac *Muntiacus muntjak*. The deer was lying on its right side and the magpies had eaten right through the left side exposing the deer's rib cage. The deer was obviously a road casualty and had either been hit as it ran across the road and then died, or was placed there by the person who had hit it. I somehow think it was the former as the deer was not badly damaged proving that it may have been hit by a glancing blow and then died of shock. The corpse was fresh, as there was no evidence of the mammal decomposing. Although I have seen Magpies feeding on carrion before I have never seen them eating a Muntjac. It was like Vultures at the corpse of an African Lion.

Colin Jacobs

CAT BASKET UNDER ATTACK

Getting our cane cat-basket (which we have had for at least ten years) out of a cupboard recently, I found it sitting in what looked like fine sand. Closer inspection showed this to be wood-dust, and we then realised that the cane was riddled with fairly substantial (2 mm diameter) holes. We had recourse to that invaluable book **Wildlife in House and Home** (Collins, 1977), and found details of a South-east Asian long horn beetle *Chlorophorus annularis*, notorious for damaging bamboo houses.

Imported canes can contain the larvae, whose development takes several years. In our case, there was no sign of the adult beetles, much to Ken Durrant's disappointment. They must have flown and, very fortunately for us, they will attack no other timber!

Paul Banham

FELIS CONCOLOR, A FIRST FOR NORFOLK?

New species to our county are regularly being found by naturalists and scientific surveys. The Wildlife 2000 initiative is now a driving force behind those seeking new records and an incentive to those who would not normally submit their records. Would it not be grand if out of all this Norfolk could be the first county in Britain to record *Felis concolor*, the Puma, as an addition to its wild fauna?

Examining this possibility creates many questions regarding the recording of species which I feel are worth considering.

There is much talk of recording for posterity, for the generations to come. I hope this means for the sake of the generations of the species recorded yet to come. Unless recording can help other species survive the onslaught of our own I would suggest that it is an activity designed for our own pleasure. This is not wrong, but like so many things we do for pleasure it could get out of hand and needs keeping a wary eye on. I cite the Victorian, personal, corpse collections as an example where the individual creature is no better than a coin or stamp.

The first and most sacred quality of any record is that it must be accurate. There is no place for only ninety nine per cent accuracy.

To achieve this level of integrity the individual submitting a record must have two qualities. They must be in possession of sure knowledge, either in what they know themselves or that contained in literature that they have access to. (I would suggest that both knowledge and literature need to be continually monitored and questioned for accuracy). However, the most important quality of a recorder is total honesty. He or she must be prepared to sacrifice a precious record for that honesty. The honesty needed to admit a lack of knowledge or a less than certain identification of even a common or well known species. The integrity of the record reflects that of its recorder.

So what would convince the mammal recorder for Norfolk that a record of a wild-living Puma is one hundred per cent certain?

Would it be the proven knowledge and integrity of the person submitting the record? Would that person have to have referees as to those qualities? Would it be necessary for the animal to be caught and the identification witnessed? Would a film of the animal suffice or casts of paw prints or still photographs? All these may seem on first consideration to be enough, but are they? They are all still very much open to question.

Why is the Norfolk Puma so different from any other species? Records of other species are accepted with less scrutiny than as applied above and yet the integrity of every record must remain the same. Dare I suggest that identifying a Puma would be somewhat easier for almost everyone than separating a Starling from a Blackbird!

We are still at the stage of examining witness reports rather than submitting records. This has not been helped by sensationalist media attention which has gained for the beast the status of mysterious legend rather than a genuine but as yet unrecorded wild member of our fauna.

As a Norfolk Constabulary Wildlife Liaison Officer I have had the opportunity of hearing about almost all the sightings reported to the police. I have interviewed, using the latest interrogation techniques, many witnesses and have visited the vicinities of many sightings. I have attended a conference called by the Chief Constable on the subject which had representatives of virtually every possible interested body attending. I feel therefore that I probably have a fairly rounded view of the situation concerning this "phenomena".

If one assumes that witnesses are not lying, they tell convincing stories. Almost all describe seeing a large cat-like animal, usually black or dark brown, its size approximating that of an Alsatian dog. They describe a long, upward curving tail and sometimes a bounding gait. My own experience at 23.30 hours, near Acle, was exactly as described above. Some witnesses go further and describe facial patterns, pricked, small ears and thin appearance when viewed from the front. Some say "I saw a Puma!". My enquiries into the feasibility of a Puma living as nature intended in Norfolk lead me to believe it is quite possible. It could even be possible for a small breeding population to survive without preying on livestock, I am informed.

If the evidence available were put before a court, the jury would easily find a verdict of, "yes there is a large cat living in Norfolk". I do not believe they could assign that cat to a species. A jury's verdict is enough to send a man to prison for life on far less evidence than is needed to create a record for Wildlife 2000!

Anyone can be genuine but mistaken but there are many reasons why people lie. They lie for a brief appearance in the media, for a "laugh", or just for the gratification of "having one over" on someone else. The more convincing the person, the better

the lie and once you have lied you can never, ever go back on it and so it grows and grows. I am sure many big-cat sighting are lies. It only needs one to be true however!

It is clear to me that if small, static, habitat dependant species living in well studied areas, like the spider *Araneus marmoreus* in Foxley Wood or the slug *Limax cinereoniger* at Swanton Novers, can go unnoticed, how much more difficult it will be to create a true record of a shy, elusive, mobile, well camouflaged, mainly nocturnal animal like the Puma.

The creation of a record is the result of knowledge of a fact, a truth in other words. There is a difference between "to know" and "to believe". One can believe in what a lie tells you. I must throw my cards upon the table and say therefore that I believe there is a Puma out there but I know not if that is the truth.

If anyone is interested in creating this record and finding the beast I shall be glad to assist with the information I have. As an appetizer though, I would suggest a dawn vigil from the top of Reedham or Wickhampton church towers with telescope, walkie-talkie and video camera and a partner, mobile on the ground. This way you may solve a mystery and record a fact.



THE INTEGRITY OF THE RECORD REFLECTS THAT OF ITS RECORDER!

Garth. M. Coupland

TO ALL LOCAL NATURALISTS

As some of you will be aware, I have for the last 11-12 years been archiving and databasing the many writings of Ted Ellis. A very interesting occupation and very informative. All information is available for a small fee to all interested parties. My main project for the next year or two is to obtain copies of nature observations at Wheatfen SINCE Ted died (22/7/86) and I invite you all to send me what you can. All submissions will be acknowledged and (one day!) released to you all in some form or other. I can handle all forms of computer records on disk. If in doubt-ring, or if preferred write by hand or use the old steam typewriter!!

Thankyou

Chris Blenkiron, 143, Norwich Road, New Costessey, Norwich, NR5 OLD. Telephone 01603 744109, evenings
e-mail 100117.1137@compuserve.com

website:http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/ellis_nature_wheatfen_fungus

WALL PLANTS IN WEST NORFOLK

Society member Ron Payne has published a paper on the flora of walls in west Norfolk. For seven years he has studied the flowering plants and ferns on almost one thousand walls throughout the west of the county and listed four hundred and eighteen different species. In this paper the data gathered is analysed in various ways and comparisons are made with earlier surveys in other parts of England.

The paper is available from Mr.R. M. Payne, Applegate, Thieves Bridge Road, Wollington, King's Lynn, Norfolk. PE33 0HL. The price is £3, and all profits will go into the fund for publishing the new county flora now due to be published in 1999.

A BIRD CAKE WITH A DIFFERENCE

Have I made a breakthrough in the manufacture of Bird Cake?

Take 2 lb of pure lard (additive free). Dissolve it slowly over low heat. Add approximately the same weight of crushed oats or corn, (I use Haith's Song Bird Mix,) then add about 4oz of Gram Flour (a flour made from lentils). Mix well until stiff - adding more bulk to the fat if too loose-then fill 2 / 3 ins. basins with the mix and cool either in a cool spot or, if room in the fridge.

The cakes are proving extremely popular: apart from the regular customers - Starlings, Blackbirds, Tits of various types including the Long Tailed, Siskin, Greenfinch, Greater Spotted Woodpecker, I have actually enticed the Goldcrest from the nearby conifers to have a go. At first I was naturally a little concerned. However it came back for more two or three times over the next few days, so obviously it finds it palatable. Maybe the bird population have heard rumours of this "Indian food thing"!

Roger A. R. Clarke

I have heard of Bird Cake being put in a coconut half with a hole in the bottom with string knotted and threaded through so that it hangs upside down for Blue Tits. Colin

STRANGE BEHAVIOUR OF SISKINS

I am fortunate enough to have a small flock (12 approx) of Siskins feeding regularly on nuts and sunflower seeds, up to eight at any one time. Every so often all will stop feeding and freeze for periods of up to a minute whilst other birds present, Coal, Blue and Great Tits, Green Finches and House Sparrows will continue to feed quite normally. There are two multiple feeding areas out of sight of each other but in full view from where I sit and Siskins feeding in both areas will freeze simultaneously. I can only assume that there must be some sound that only they can hear.

A. P. Goodfellow February 1998

FEBRUARY 1998 SIGHTINGS

On 26th about 0830hrs I was walking through Stow Bedon and saw a Wood Mouse on the road edge. It looked in perfect condition but my gentle prodding failed to persuade it to move into the grass verge. Finally I scooped it up with my map case and deposited it onto the grass. It then crept under some leaves. Its deep brown eyes looked alert but I wondered if it had just woken up and wasn't quite "with us".

The same day I saw a flock of about 150 Chaffinches flitting around between Merton Wood and Lowster Hill in Peddars Way.

We live about a mile from Wayland Wood, and believe the Hawfinches which have visited our garden for 20 years come from there to feed off the nutlets under the Hornbeam. February's sighting were 2 males on 8th, 13th, 22nd and 1 female on 14th. Each visit was for water in the birdbath.

The most exciting February visitor was a male Sparrowhawk. We've never had one before and I couldn't believe my luck at seeing one so close. About mid-day on Friday 20th I heard a "thud" on the sitting room window. I crossed the room, looked

out and saw about a yard on the lawn a Sparrowhawk crouching over its victim. The Blackbird was on its back, the Sparrowhawk with its talons digging into its breast was bouncing up and down squeezing the life out of its victim. The Blackbird was making high pitched cries. When the Sparrowhawk started to pluck the breast feathers I tapped sharply on the window. It turned its head and stared at me, still keeping its wings arched over its prey. Then it returned to the plucking of the squeaking Blackbird. I went through 2 rooms, along the garden path and the hawk flew off low across the garden, skimming the fence with the hapless Blackbird in its talons. All that was left was a pile of soft black feathers.

Susan Pallister

MARRIOTT'S WAY - WEDNESDAY 25TH MARCH

On a wet, cool and windy morning I was delighted that six other members of the Society took the trouble to turn up. Fortunately the rain soon stopped and we enjoyed our two and a half hours meander along the old M.& G.N. railway line. This time we were not disturbed by a sponsored walk and met virtually nobody.

We identified 23 species of birds with perhaps the most surprising being a Woodcock . A singing Chiffchaff was a year tick for some of us, but we were unable to see it.

We meandered as far as the industrial complex where a lot of noise was emanating from what seems to be a car crushing plant. It was near here that we discovered what was for me the surprise of the morning, about 10 yards of the actual old track still in situ. This must be the only bit left!

This stretch of the track will be a good place for anybody interested in wild flowers, to walk in summer. Fourteen species were identified.

I have long been interested in Marriott's Way and frequently walk the Costessey stretch. I have some enthusiasm for steam trains and recall with affection, riding the line in my younger days. It is nearly 40 years since passenger traffic ceased. The County Council now wish to "improve" the track to encourage greater use and it is hoped that this will be done in a sensible manner to protect the wildlife.

I would like to add a postscript to my note in the last "Natterjack" in that Large White Butterfly caterpillars were on my Broccoli until 2nd February and one person reported having them on his, also in Costessey, on 8th February.

John Butcher

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

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Members who pay by cheque are reminded that subscriptions fell due on 1st April, 1998. Current rates are £10 for ordinary and family members and £15 for affiliated groups. Please make cheques payable to Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society and send them to:

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

**From.....
Address.....
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