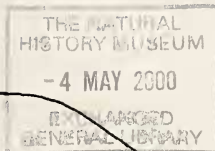




Number 63



November 1998

# THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

## Programme 1999

### Sunday 17 January

Meet at Strumpshaw RSPB Reserve at 1030 hrs to consolidate into fewer cars. OS Grid Ref: TG 341 066.

First we go to the Cantley Sugar Factory to hear a short explanation about the ecology of the site, followed by a walk round the settling lagoons. The sugar factory uses water to wash the beet off lorries and then to transport it into the factory. This water then flows into settling lagoons before flowing back into the river.

Second we travel to Buckenham Marshes where car parking is limited.

We return to Strumpshaw for a packed lunch and toilets. In the afternoon Mike Poulton will take anyone interested round the reserve.

### Sunday 18 April

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. OS Grid Ref: TM 142 977.

This is the third visit to this reserve, looking at it through the seasons.

John Mott

### CHANGE OF ADDRESS

GILES DUNMORE, County Bird Recorder for the Society has recently moved to:

49 Nelson Road, Sheringham, Norfolk, NR26 8DA (Tel: 01263 822550)

Contributors to the BIRD REPORT are asked to send all records to him at the above address, preferably on a monthly basis so that work on the preparation of the classified list can be spread throughout the year.

## A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The Society's Council could find itself homeless early next year. For many years meetings have been held in the Norwich Castle Museum, the Society's "spiritual home", but that arrangement must come to an end with the start of the major refurbishment work that will in time give us a much improved museum but in the meantime will cause a great deal of disruption.

Several possibilities for a new venue are being explored by members of Council but if any other members of the Society have any suggestions or contacts that might help us find a suitable new home we would be glad to hear from you.

We need a room, preferably in the Norwich area, that will comfortably seat 30-35 Council members at five or six meetings a year. Needless to say, we are looking for somewhere that will not cost a fortune to hire. We do not need kitchen facilities - just chairs and tables.

David Paull, Chairman

## MYSTERY SOLVED

A little learning is rapidly exposed. I bought a *Pieris* from a local supermarket and set about transferring it to a large terracotta pot. As I removed the plant from its plastic pot, I noticed among the roots what I was convinced were insect eggs. The plant was invested with them. Not wanting to breed something nasty in clean, new compost, I carefully teased out the roots and removed the offending eggs. I destroyed all but a few that I kept for identification. It was a bold Robert Maidstone who came up with the answer. He popped one and tasted it. It was a slow-release fertilizer capsule!

David Paull

## MARSTON MARSH, EATON, NORWICH, JUNE 3<sup>rd</sup> 1998

Without the slightest hint from the weather forecasters of what was in store for us, I led a small group of members out across my local "patch". Barely half an hour later, we abandoned Marston Marsh and fled as fast as our wellies would carry us. With lightning and thunder directly and alarmingly overhead, the heavens opened and we were bombarded with quarter-inch hailstones. When we escaped to the footpath and the road, we found drifts of hail an inch or more deep. And this was June 3<sup>rd</sup>!

Fortunately we had just long enough to see several of the "goodies" the marsh has to offer and to note how the state of the marsh flora was markedly different from the same time last year. The marsh, designated as a local nature reserve by Norwich City Council and forming part of the city boundary where it lies along side the River Yare, had been flooded during the winter, a common and welcome occurrence, but then there were the Easter floods and much of the marsh was again under a foot or more of water after the Yare topped its banks.

Probably as a result of this dousing very late in the season, the effect on the orchids was significant. Whereas a year earlier there had been relatively few Early Marsh Orchids *Dactylorhiza incarnata* but mostly full-sized, vigorous spikes, this year there were many more spikes but almost all of them were severely stunted. Similarly, although we were a little early for Southern Marsh Orchid *D. praetermissa*, those we found were also no more than a few inches high and seemingly unlikely to get much bigger. Last year, when I tried to photograph the orchids, I had to fight my way through dense swathes of Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor*. This year it was a case of looking for them. Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* was also rather less evident. By contrast, Common Meadow-rue *Thalictrum flavum* and Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* seemed to be revelling in the wetter conditions and were rampant. Hardly surprising, the birds, butterflies and dragonflies had more sense than the naturalists and kept their heads down. But on a "recce" the previous afternoon - in hot sunshine! - I had noted some of the marsh's familiar clutch of warblers (Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Whitethroat, Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler, but as yet no Sedge or Reed Warblers), six species of butterflies (Holly Blue, Common Blue, Speckled Wood, Red Admiral, Green-veined White and Small White), and Azure Damselflies *Coenagrion puella*. This may well have been the Society's shortest field trip on record, apart from those that have been rained off before they started. We must try again some time.

David Paull

## GALL ON WELSH POPPY

It is not surprising that we have reared the gall wasps *Aylax papaveris* from the capsules of the garden Shirley Poppies. An examination of the capsules of the Welsh Poppy *Meconopsis cambrica* also revealed a swelling inside containing white grubs. They seemed to have affected the septa of the capsules and are, possibly, the work of *Aylax papaveris*.

The emergence of any gall wasps is not expected until next year. It was also noted that capsules collected and ripening after 3<sup>rd</sup> August had no galls, possibly the season was over for their production.

Reg Evans

## KNOPPER GALL - CAUSERS, INQUILINES AND PARASITES

A collection of 39 fallen knopper galls was made in Hockering wood on the 18th. May, 1997. Emergence of the gall causer was not expected until the following year, however, during May and June of that year smaller blackish wasps emerged. These were the inquilines ('lodgers') which emerged through small holes scattered on the surface of the galls. They numbered 224 and belonged to the genus *Synergus* of which *S. umbraculus* is a species which we have reared from marble galls *Andricus kollari*.

On 12th. February, 1998, 24 gall causers *Andricus quercuscalicis* were noted. Dissection of the galls revealed that some had failed to emerge and were found dead inside the galls, perhaps conditions were too dry. A parasitic chalcid wasp, *Mesopolobus jucundus* (Pteromalidae) was present, a species which we have also recorded from oak pea galls *Cynips divisa*. The inquiline, *Synergus*, has yet to be determined.

Lilian Evans

## MODERN MATERIAL MIMICRY MYSTIFIES MAYFLIES

When I received a 'phone call from David Fagg from Strumpshaw he told me that hundreds of flies appeared to be egg laying on his wet flat roof, "What were they?" The proverbial question came to mind, 'How long is a piece of string?' I suspected mayflies but told him to send some and I would name them for him.

They duly arrived and I was able to say they were mayflies of a specie *Cloeon dipterum* L. Some years ago at Ludham I had seen a number of mayfly bodies at the side of a large puddle on the side of the road where I presumed they had been blown by passing vehicles. I thought no more about the incident until I attended the Scout camp at Decoy Broad last year to visit the younger generation of my tribe. When I parked my car I noticed that many of the scout's cars that had been there all night were covered with small mayflies called *Caenis luctuosa* Burm. It had rained previously but the sun had dried out most of the vehicles by the time I arrived. On visiting the green mess marquee for a welcoming cup of smoky tea I noticed that the entire outside roof was also covered with thousands of their dried up bodies.

David Fagg has recently sent me a few pages from this summer's issues of "The New Scientist" in which the answer to this phenomenon has been solved in Hungary.

The family name for mayflies is Ephemeroptera which means "One day on the wing". Having spent an aquatic nymphal life in the water from a few months up to two years according to the specie, the final aquatic moult is fully winged and as such they leave the water and are capable of a short flight, in this stage their wings are dull and opaque and fishermen call them "Duns". After a short rest they moult again into the beautiful and graceful fully sexed insects that fishermen call "Spinners". The males gather in large swarms, rising and falling in their mating display, to attract the females. Mating takes place on the wing and the females have to find water and deposit their eggs before ending their short but hectic adult existence.

It is known that insects with aquatic larvae are attracted to water by the light reflected off the surface that is strongly polarised in the horizontal plane. The Hungarian scientists noticed that mayflies were laying eggs on the surface of wet asphalt roads, they also proved that the light reflected from such roads was also horizontally polarised. By experimenting with various coloured plastic sheets they found that black shiny plastic attracted the most insects, they also proved that smooth asphalt roads produced polarised light almost as good as the smooth black plastic and as the road area was far greater than that of the nearby stream it was more attractive to the insects.

Over the years when my car has been parked near an expanse of water in summer I have had the occasional water insect such as Corixid or Notonecta land with a plop on the bonnet or roof. Alan Stubbs, an entomologist, however writes that from 1972 in the Thames valley new cars stored near water prior to sale sustained paintwork damage in June when swarms of mayflies were attracted by polarised light reflections, then they were virtually fried alive on the hot metal surfaces, their body fluids often etched right through the paint film and left recognisable imprints of the insects.

Another writer from Little Dale in Yorkshire stated that after rain showers wagtails were to be found on the smooth asphalt road eating the many insects attracted there, but never on rough or coloured road surfaces. They had noticed that the flattened bodies of hedgehogs were more often found in such areas having been enticed by the increase in insect food and this had led to their demise.

It maybe that with the increase of smooth asphalt roads we may find a decrease in vulnerable mayfly species in certain areas if they continue to lay their eggs on roofs and roads.

Ken Durrant

## A WOODLAND WALK IN MAY

Some years ago I found a dead chicken one morning which had 14 large burying beetles beneath it. They were all black except for the reddish antennal clubs. to my surprise they had all left the carcase by midday. Since then we have examined carrion for the presence of this and other red-banded species.

On this walk, Gordon Meek found a white wing lying in the wood, and no sign of the carcase (fox?). On moving the feathers, there were no less than five mating pairs of the Red-breasted Carrion Beetle *Oiceoptoma thoracicum*.

Since we are always looking beneath logs for fungi as well as carrion, it seems to us to be uncommon. We have only two previous records in Norfolk. Perhaps we have been unlucky.

Fungi were scarce but Christine Meek pointed out a little buff cup fungus about 2" x 2" and the red discs of a fungus *Scutellinia scutellata* which has black hairs around the edges of the disc and is sometimes called the 'eyelash fungus'.

A green shield bug *Palomena prasina* was seen, perhaps just emerged from hibernation - in which state it becomes brownish, regaining its colour on becoming active. It readily took to flight.

Reg & Lil Evans

## A PIRATE SPIDER (ERO)

This small spider has a rounded abdomen bearing one or two pairs of humps. The legs are banded and with a lens the Genus can be identified (Ero).

Examination of an old birds' nest revealed a variety of small spiders, fly larvae and other invertebrates. A surprising find was a female pirate spider. This was caught and offered a swatted 'bluebottle'. According to the literature this should be unacceptable as other spiders are said to be its only prey. Our pirate spider moved closer to this freshly killed fly and was presumed to be resting upon it. By the evening it had moved to the other end and (with a lens) could be seen feeding. Two days later the spider accepted another dead 'bluebottle'.

It was thought that the pirate spider possibly after eating the owner of a web, becomes a scavenger for any remnants left by the victim.

The introduction of a few fruit flies (*Drosophila*) into the container had unexpected results. One fruit fly moving close to the spider was promptly seized and eaten. The attack was rapid and reminiscent of a crab spider.

Clearly this spider will eat both dead or live flies. It has put on weight during the last fortnight. The observation continues.

Reg Evans



## THE BIG GREEN JOBS

I made a mental note based on an article in "Natterjack" last year by Garth Coupland, to get out to the village of Reedham this SUMMER (that's a laugh to start with) and try and photograph the Great Green Bush Cricket *Tettigonia viridissima*.

I had not seen this lovely, huge insect since I was a child and lived in Wymondham. According to Garth they were still found in Reedham village centre, enjoying hedges, rough areas etc., and were in fair numbers. I walked down lanes, up roads, through fields, over gates, under trees etc., for a long time listening for the 'song'. I had begun to have thoughts of this cricket being a mythical creature here in Reedham. I waded through grass and nettle patches, stepped over brambles, climbed over and through various tree limbs shed by the wind - nothing. I did come across fair numbers of what I took to be Dark Bush Crickets *Pholidoptera griseoaptera* but these were not the quarry, they were but small fry to what I was hoping to find.

I had all but given up on the quest and was making my way back when suddenly I heard it, the loud continuous 'sewing machine-like' sound. My heart missed a beat, could this really be what I had come to see? I approached with great care as Garth had advised and when I got close to the sound I stared into the hawthorn hedge trying to spot the singer. Stand very still he had said, so I looked hard at the spot hoping to see a movement. It was uncanny, just like one of those 'Magic Eye' pictures from the magazines. My eyes were flicking all over a square foot of hedge and then suddenly, there it was right in front of me, this huge bright green 'grasshopper-like beast', in full view sitting on a hawthorn branch. What a moment, with 'haking hands I set the camera up - as I was getting a few photographs I heard another 'singer' just along the hedge. In all I found four along about fifty yards of hedgerow, all 'singing' males. Garth had said in his article that he had only ever found two females. I can understand this, because they don't 'sing' they would be impossible to find, so well do they merge with their surroundings.

Then with honour restored and a few photographs in the camera I wended my way back to the car. A happy man, privileged to see such a beautiful insect. It was also rather nostalgic because the last one I had seen was about fifty-five years ago - then, as now I marvelled at its size and colour.

Tony Howes

## ANTICS IN THE POND

When conditions are suitable I like to take a cup of tea outside and sit by the pond for a while, it's a chance to 'catch up' with what's happening in that part of the garden. Yesterday (the last day of August) was one of the few this summer when conditions were reasonable enough to indulge in this activity.

As I watched the goldfish swimming around, an adult frog popped its head up out of the surface weed. There were many wasps flying in and out of the pond for a drink. They don't normally stay for many seconds and I watched one land on the weed close to the frog, which instantly lunged forward and grabbed the wasp, the eyes blinked and that was that. I saw the same thing happen several minutes later. This rather surprised me as I would have expected the frog to have been stung, if it was it didn't seem to have any effect on it. Later still I watched a wasp climbing up an iris stem in the water, the frog came from probably 18 inches away towards the movement and actually leapt from the water to attempt to catch it - we live and learn.

Tony Howes

## MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Following the untimely death of Colin Dack (see next page) a vacancy has arisen for the post of Membership Secretary. Any member of the Society interested in taking up this post please contact the Secretary of the Society, Dr. A. R. Leech at the following address: 3 Eccles Road, Holt, Norfolk, NR25 6HJ before January 1<sup>st</sup> 1999.

## NATTERJACK EDITOR

Colin Dack was also the editor of the quarterly "Natterjack", a position he had held since February 1987 (Issue 16). This edition, therefore is understandably late, although the majority of it was put together by Colin before he became ill. As the new editor I have had to hold over an article or two until the February issue for obvious reasons. If any member wishes to share their thoughts or personal reflections regarding Colin I look forward to receiving them along with your natural history news and views in 1999.

Francis Farrow.

## OBITUARY

COLIN DACK  
(1940 - 1998)

It is with great sadness that we hear of the death of Colin Dack, on November 14<sup>th</sup> in Addenbrooks Hospital, Cambridge, following a cerebral haemorrhage.

Colin has been a valued member of Council and an enthusiastic worker behind the scenes for the Society for many years in the capacity of Membership Secretary and was one of the first members to advocate using computers for the Society's work.

After leaving school he was apprenticed at engineering, later being 'called up' in the R.A.F., where he saw service in Aden and the Far East as an armourer together with another of our late members, Philip Cambridge. Following his discharge, Colin returned home to Dereham to continue both his occupation as an engineer and his hobbies, being in the main, photography, natural history and geology. He was a regular attendant of our meetings, both indoor and field, and latterly had taken a specific interest in birds.

Following the death of his parents, Colin greatly appreciated his friends in the Society as his family. He undertook the production of the "Natterjack" diligently (this being his last - retrieved from the computer) and together with other duties often worked late into the night to get copy ready for the printers, and with a little help (usually demanded in his own inimitable way) prepared the Society's publications for dispatch.

The writer has known Colin since his school days and (like many other Society members) will miss those late night chats on the 'phone.

Ken Durrant

### COLIN DACK - A personal tribute.

A complex man - there were times when he could exasperate one beyond measure; his interruptions at a Society meeting, his numerous telephone calls - usually at meal times, however, beneath that gruff exterior Colin had a heart of gold. His concern for people, his genuine interest in our families, coupled with his fund of general knowledge on many topics, freely given to young and old alike, will be remembered by many.

A lonely man, the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society became Colin's 'family' and from its members he had a circle of friends.

We shall miss him at indoor meetings and on field excursions, complete with telescope and tripod and on his shoulder his large camera bag containing an assortment of cameras and a selection of lenses.

May he rest in peace.

Mary Dorling

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Please send items for February Natterjack before 1<sup>st</sup> January 1999 to:  
Francis Farrow, "Heathlands", 6 Havelock Road, Sheringham, Norfolk, NR26 8QD.