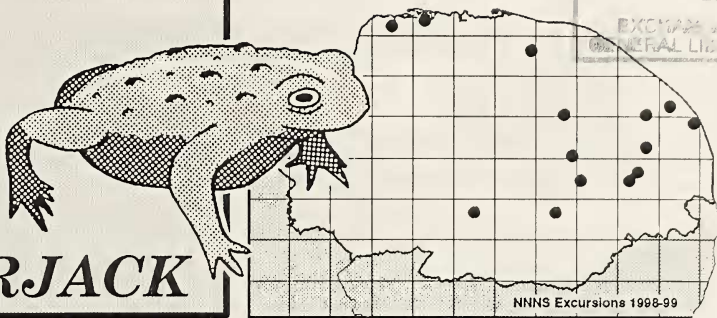


THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK



Toad-in-the-hole.....

Welcome to the first bulletin of the new year. It comes to you with a *new* editor and a *new* look! This issue of 'The Norfolk Natterjack' sports a bold *new* front page, featuring a *new* 'toad' by Tony Leech combined with a Norfolk DMAP of current excursion locations and an all *new* magazine-style format.

Presentation is very important and the Society, as you know, will be in the forefront of publishing over the next year or two with the numerous 'Wildlife 2000' articles presently being written up. These papers will be of great value in the future.

Such is the significance of the 'Wildlife 2000' project that the Society's lead should command a high profile and the new look of the 'Natterjack' aims in part to promote this. In this issue you will note that members are being extremely observant and not only are they finding additional Norfolk records but new national ones too.

Now, as many of you will be venturing into the field as spring approaches, please send in your own observations and news items to the 'Natterjack' then I won't have to fill *in-the-hole!*

'FF'

Colin's legacy

A meeting has been arranged for October 19th as a memorial to Colin Dack (former Membership Secretary and 'Natterjack' editor). Colin enjoyed photography and has left his collection of almost 10,000 slides to the Society. He never showed his slides so after extensive sorting members will have an exclusive chance to view his work. As Colin was dyslexic the NNNs Council agreed that at this special evening a collection could be made with donations going to a local dyslexia group in Colin's memory. Further details will be given when finalised by the Programme committee.

Field Meeting Reminders

Sunday 28th February Leader: Charles Neale
Morning walk at Burnham Norton for birds.
Meet 1030 hrs. in the car park at TF 828442

Sunday 18th April Leader: Barry Watkins (Warden)
Ashwellthorpe Lower Wood through the seasons : Spring.
All-day meeting from 1100 hrs. Park at the Old Post Office, TM 142977



N.B. Photographic Group members' evening: **Tuesday 22nd March**
and Photographic Group lecture '*This beautiful world of ours*'
Tuesday 20th April at 1930 hrs. in the Assembly House, Norwich.
(Pierce and Kent Rooms respectively)

Don't forget...

Annual
General Meeting
Tuesday 16th March, 1999
1930hrs
Kent Room, Assembly House,
Norwich

The AGM will be followed by
'The Upper Bure Valley'
an illustrated talk by
Anne Brewster

The quarterly bulletin
of the
Norfolk & Norwich
Naturalists' Society



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THE WINGED BUCCANEER

I have a sneaking admiration for all raptors. They have always been to me the gallant swash-buckling, "Look out, here I come" members of our avian friends.

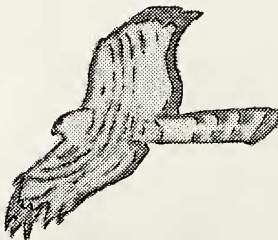
Here in Norfolk we are not over endowed with their ranks, therefore I was pleased when Sparrow-hawks began making a come back after the disastrous period of the 1950's. We began to see the odd one or two over my home village of Thorpe St. Andrew. Then about ten years ago I first noticed a display flight over our woodlands, (mainly thirty year old conifers), ideal nesting for this species. Each year since they have shown up during March and April, circling on the thermals, tails fanned and often going into long, steep glides with wings partly closed. At times you can hear the high pitched, mewing calls as they spiral way up above the trees. If I am working in the garden at this time of year I like to get the binoculars and scan the sky, I have found that warm sunny days, often with fleecy white clouds being gently pushed by a breeze are to their liking. It always gives me a thrill to pick out that unmistakable silhouette as it banks way above. Sometimes they climb so high that they are mere specks, even in the binoculars. Marsh Harriers will do the same. I am sure they just love being up there. It's fun - it's being alive!

We begin to see, in May and June, Sparrow-hawks returning to the woods with prey in their talons, even quite late in the evening they will pass over. Last year my next door neighbour told me of a strange bird they had seen in their garden (they are not birdy people) eating a Starling. When I went to look, there was the unmistakable circle of plucked feathers, and one leg. Then a few weeks later they had

the same thing happen again, only this time it was a young Blackbird. Now at this point one has to put things into perspective, my neighbour is not alone, this is happening in many gardens in villages and towns throughout the land. It must amount to many hundreds, even thousands of small birds per annum being killed for Sparrow-hawk families. There are many people I am sure who throw up their hands in horror at this thought but this is life in the raw, it has been going on for a long, long time. Sparrow-hawks, along with other raptors have been killing and eating small birds since time began. My own view is that Mother Nature sorts things out for the best in the long run, we will not lose all our songbirds to Sparrow-hawks, if it happens, it will be the result of our (*Homo sapiens*) own greed and thoughtlessness. All other creatures on this earth can and do live together without too much hassle, only we as a species have the ability to throw the proverbial spanner in the works.

So I say enjoy the gallant buccaneer with his break-neck dashes through the gardens and lanes, he came back from the brink, and I for one was very pleased at his return.

Tony Howes



AT LARGE IN NORFOLK

What sort of a year (1998) was it for four veterans of the Society? To go into Norfolk on field days with such characters as Ken Durrant, Keith Clarke and Derek Howlett is never dull. Something interesting always seems to be discovered or happens. One learns that Ken loves to eat whitebait with brown bread and butter washed down with a glass of ale, Derek falls onto steak and kidney pie and chips and Keith is a compulsive treacle tart and custard addict. In fact before planning any visit we have first to ascertain whether the local inn serves treacle pudding and/or even spotted dick and custard.

I have decided that I should have studied entomology. Ken never bends down. He uses his sweep net at waist height and I have learnt that anything living low down in the vegetation can be classified as being "common" and of no value!!! With molluscs one has to get down onto one's knees.

We soon learnt that by cutting a hole in Derek's rubber boots that he would be forced to wear waders. This has allowed us all to stay warm and dry as he uses his net in waters deeper than we are able to enter. I recommend this strategy to colleagues.

Being an algal expert also has its moments. One just needs a bottle to collect a sample of water quickly in the field before scurrying off to the warmth of the car prior to using the heated laboratory to identify the diatoms. Keith has worked out this effective method for study on winters days when the north wind cuts across Norfolk.

In April we returned to the River Nar to complete a survey started in the previous summer. For members who do not know this beautiful part of Norfolk we recommend that you park car near the Castle and walk down to the river. The site is alive with natural history interests. As you walk down you should see a pattern of ditches across the meadows. These are the remains of a once extensive floating water-meadows system constructed in 1810 for Thomas Purdey of Castle Acre. The work entailed building channels, sluices, carriers and drain-like tunnels to irrigate the meadows. The idea was to flood the meadows early in the spring and so encourage the grass to grow and then by repeating the process in the mid-summer to gain additional grazing feed. Sadly in Norfolk the cold climate caused the system to be less successful than in the West Country.

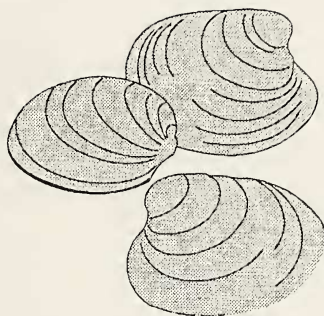
Diatoms require good eyesight, a knowledge of German and a strange self-fixation which grows with age!!! To get excited over the discovery at East Lexham of *Ellerbeckia arenaria* and at Castle Acre of *Aulacoseira coenulata* is my equivalent of supporting Norwich City football club.

In May we spent a few days at Seamer. Keith got very excited at the chance to obtain a core from the mere bottom to see the diatom succession and gain some insights into the history of the lake. With a group of students from the University he set out in two boats to take the core. From the bank one could see these "experts" in their two craft trying to steady the boats and hold them in position to get the muds up from the bottom. The imagery is embedded in the mind. And they called it scientific work!!

The River Stiffkey provided us with a number of pleasant days in the field. On 25th August 1998 we saw swarms of mayflies *Leptophlebia vespertina* (L.) rising from the river. Ken led us through the life stages and we were able to follow the mayflies making for some nearby hawthorn trees to settle. This noon swarming provided us with much to talk over as we descended upon plates of whitebait for lunch.

A survey for the rare snail *Vertigo angustior* led us along the Tas river valley. Flordon Common is the classic site for Norfolk, although in the late 1980's the beast was discovered on the edge of the Waveney Forest at Fritton. We have since found a new site at Saxlingham Thorpe. This snail is so small that one has to use creative imagination to see it in the field. It is known from only a few sites elsewhere in the U.K. so Norfolk has three for this extremely rare species.

In October we were returning from a trawling of mussels in the River Chet via the inn at Reedham Ferry when Derek begs us to let him have a dip into the waters with his hand net. At first we refused since it was getting dark and we all wanted to go home. In the end he prevailed. His first dip brought up a funny cockle-like bivalve. None of us had seen it before in Norfolk but Derek remembered from his extensive shell collection that it belonged to some species beginning with the letter "C". It turned out to be the asiatic clam *Corbicula fluminea* (Müller). This has been invading Europe from South China and the Philippines since the early 1980's. It is the first U.K. record for the



species. How it arrived in the River Chet from the Far East is anyone's guess. By boat? By koi carp importation? Who knows?

We have been monitoring and recording the molluscs, algae and diatoms of the meres, lakes and rivers of the Battle Area since early November for the army. On a freezing, wet cold day in late December we returned after treacle pudding and custard at the White Horse to look at West Mere, Tottingham. After years of drought the mere is now refilling from the underground waters. It is about 0.8m deep and already a pond weed, *Potamogeton gramineus*, is emerging. There are few mollusc species but it would be valuable to follow the changes and succession in the populations as the mere fills up and the aquatic vegetation changes. Sadly at our ages this will have to be left for others to study.

One strange creature that was present is a dark green ostracod with two spines protruding from its carapace. This turned out to be *Cypris bispinosa* the largest of the British ostracods. It is currently only known from two sites in the U.K., one in the Channel Islands and one in Cornwall. We now have a Norfolk record and the third for the U.K.

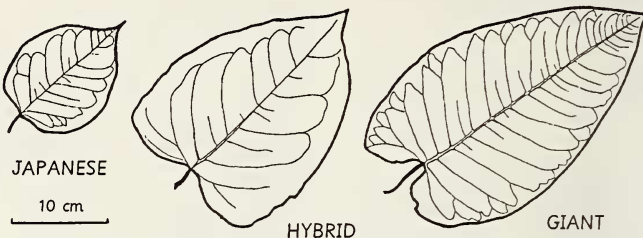
Roy Baker

HYBRID JAPANESE KNOTWEED

Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*, formerly known as *Polygonum cuspidatum*) is one of those all-too-numerous horticultural introductions which has escaped the confines of the garden. Although reasonably well-behaved in East Anglia, it has caused problems along river banks in Wales and in the south-east. Fortunately, the even larger Giant Knotweed (*Fallopia sachalinensis*) escapes more rarely and does not appear to cause any ecological problems. In Britain, all Japanese Knotweed plants are male-sterile and fail to produce pollen; some Giant Knotweed plants, however, do produce pollen and can fertilise the Japanese Knotweed. From seeds set in this way grows the Hybrid Knotweed (*Fallopia x bohemica*) which has also been cultivated.

My interest in these plants arose from meeting Catherine Pashley, a research student at the University of Leicester, who is studying the cytogenetics of the hybrid.

Figure 1: Knotweed leaves.



Within a couple of days of my hearing about this, friends John and Sue Thomson mentioned that in their garden at the Old Rectory, Hempstead, near Holt, they had two kinds of Japanese Knotweed. Armed with my newly acquired knowledge, I was delighted to find not only the two parent species but, some thirty yards away, a stand of the hybrid. This was subsequently confirmed by Catherine and her supervisor, Dr. John Bailey, when they visited the gardens.

Although known from over 100 sites around Britain, this is the first time that the hybrid has been recorded from East Anglia.

Furthermore, subject to their confirmation by DNA analysis, it appears to be only the second time that the hybrid has been found to have arisen naturally in Britain, the other being near Dolgellau.

The simplest way of identifying the hybrid is from the cuspidate base to the leaf (see figure 1, taken from the Knotweed Hybrid Survey Leaflet) and if anyone suspects that they have found a hybrid, or knows where the parents grow in proximity, I should be very pleased to pass the information on to Catherine.

Tony Leech

SOME STRUMPSHAW SIGHTINGS

As I sat in the marsh hide at Strumpshaw last January I watched a pair of Marsh Harriers displaying over the reedbeds. The day was sunny and very warm for the time of year with a gentle breeze. The birds were behaving as if it were April, calling and spiralling over the reeds, often at great heights. They would sometimes come together, one turning briefly on its back to reach out with its talons as they passed each other.

It was in this same hide during the summer of 1998 that I had watched up to four Hobbies at a time hunting dragonflies over the open water. The elegance of these falcons in flight is breathtaking, they powered just over the water taking the dragonflies with

ease. In the binoculars they could be seen eating them on the wing, holding the prey in their talons, lovely birds indeed.

Among the Grey-lag Geese that have been using the marshes of the Yare Valley for a few years there is now a bird that from a distance looks all white. I have often stalked this particular specimen trying to get close enough for a photograph, but so far in vain. I have been near enough recently to see that there is a lovely soft grey highlighting the white feathers, and the eye is dark not pink. The form and habit is certainly similar to the grey-lags, but whatever its parentage it is a very beautiful variant.

Tony Howes



If you have any line drawings of natural history subjects please send them to 'The Norfolk Natterjack'. They could be used to illustrate an article e.g. the Heron (p.5) by Society member Cherry Farrow or used as a vignette to fill a space.

Ed

HOME BIRDS

During 1998, I maintained a daily listing of bird species seen on, over or from my home at Frettenham (TG240171). I say daily, but in actual fact it was only possible to record on 343 out of the 365 days. The 'blanks' were as follows: January 2, 14, 15; May 16, 25; June 16, 27, 30; July 12, 18, 31; August 8, 9, 10, 24; September 6, 19, 20; October 8; November 27 and December 18, 24. There were no blank days in February, March and April. In general, daily observations were gathered over periods of between one and six hours; two hours having been the average (my workload not having permitted a more substantial input).

From my vantage point, particularly my first-floor dormer window, commanding a 180° viewpoint eastward of a north-

east to south-west axis to include gardens, a small fish-pond, rough pasture, overgrown hedges, (mostly) arable farmland, a worked out chalk pit, partly used for landfill, and the stone beck valley dividing Frettenham from Spixworth and Crostwick parishes, 75 species were recorded. Out of this total 23 species were observed in each month. Two more species, Wren and Carrion Crow, 'missed-out' only in August and February respectively.

The list opposite is in ranking order, viz.: rank, name and number of days - the suffix M meaning recorded in every month.

I consider that such a listing provides a useful 'snapshot' and I would like to do it all again - in a few years time!

Geoffrey Kelly

A LIVELY SNACK



Last January, as I watched from the tower hide at Strumpshaw Fen, a Cormorant surfaced from a dive with an 18 inch eel in its bill. As it tried to swallow it the eel kept winding itself round the birds neck.

This went on for several minutes, then a Heron that had been standing on the bank several yards away decided to join in the fun. It landed beside the Cormorant in deep water, swam alongside and took a stab at the eel, the Cormorant dived taking the fish with it. Twice more this happened, then the Heron flew off. Eventually the Cormorant subdued the eel enough to gulp it down, still squirming and very much alive. I wouldn't care for it myself!



Tony Howes

1	Wood Pigeon	343M
2	Starling	342M
3	Blackbird	338M
4	Collared Dove	326M
5	Stock Dove	325M
6	Blue Tit	323M
7	Chaffinch	320M
8	House Sparrow	293M
9=	Great Tit	284M
9=	Magpie	284M
11	Black-headed Gull	263M
12	Duncock	241M
13	Robin	236M
14	Greenfinch	233M
15	Mistle Thrush	222M
16	Rook	213M
17	Pied Wagtail	186
18	Jay	159M
19=	Kestrel	144M
19=	Common Gull	144
21	House Martin	123
22	Common Pheasant	103
23	Turtle Dove	99
24=	Swift	88
24=	Swallow	88
26	Lesser Black-backed Gull	87
27	Green Woodpecker	86M
28=	GL Spotted Woodpecker	84M
28=	Goldfinch	84M
30	Song Thrush	71M
31	GL Black-backed Gull	69
32	Carrion Crow	68
33	Lapwing	66M
34	Skylark	59
35	Redwing	51
36	Wren	45
37	Coal Tit	44
38	Mallard	40
39=	Jackdaw	38
39=	Siskin	38
41	Long-tailed Tit	32
42	Yellowhammer	31
43	Linnet	29
44	Cormorant	23
45	Sparrow-hawk	22
46	Grey Heron	21
47	Fieldfare	20
48=	Cuckoo	14
48=	Blackcap	14
50	Herring Gull	11
51=	Barn Owl	10
51=	Goldcrest	10
53	Grey Lag Goose	8
54	Bullfinch	7
55=	Mute Swan	5
55=	Lesser Whitethroat	5
57=	Whitethroat	4
57=	Chiffchaff	4
59	Meadow Pipit	3
60=	Canada Goose	2
60=	Willow Warbler	2
62=	Shelduck	1
62=	Teal	1
62=	Goshawk	1
62=	Hobby	1
62=	Red-legged Partridge	1
62=	Little Ringed Plover	1
62=	Golden Plover	1
62=	Curlew	1
62=	Redshank	1
62=	Kingfisher	1
62=	L. Spotted Woodpecker	1
62=	Sand Martin	1
62=	Spotted Flycatcher	1
62=	Reed Bunting	1

Nature on the net!

Some Natural History Websites

For those of you who are on-line and can "surf" the net the following information may be of interest...

The NNNS URL ('Uniform Resource Locator' - the website address) is currently getting up to 8 "hits" per day and can be found at:

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

also there is a Norfolk Wildlife finding page at:

http://www.paston.co.uk/users/golds/norf_wlw.html

John Goldsmith

OPEN DAY

Wells Field Study Centre

Friday 9th April

2.30 - 8.00pm

The study centre at Polka Road, Wells-next-the-Sea is owned and run by the Education Department of Norfolk County Council. Society members are most welcome to attend.
Christine West

Congratulations to:

Don Dorling

on his appointment as chairman of the NORFOLK WILDLIFE TRUST.

Rex Hancy

on his election to the office of chairman of the BRITISH PLANT GALL SOCIETY.

Bob Ellis

on his appointment to succeed Alec Bull as the East Norfolk recorder for the BOTANICAL SOCIETY of the BRITISH ISLES.

What bird is that?

Society member Anne Brewster is running a short course

BIRDWATCHING
for BEGINNERS

at the
Corpusty Centre
on Sat. 13th March from 2-4 pm

All welcome

Small admission charge

What have we missed?

Could Field Excursion leaders please send a short account of their day out - its highlights, any downfalls etc - to the 'Natterjack', or maybe a 'volunteer' could be nominated to write up the event. I am sure the 'stay-at-homes' would like to know what happened where and what discoveries were made!



A note to CONTRIBUTORS...

Many thanks to all who have sent material to 'The Norfolk Natterjack'. Please keep it coming for the next issue in May. Due to the very unpredictable nature of my work it would be appreciated if any correspondence could be sent to the address opposite, as soon as possible, and marked with NNNS on the envelope. This will help locate material quickly when compiling the Bulletin which could well be at very short notice.

'FF'

NNNS

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