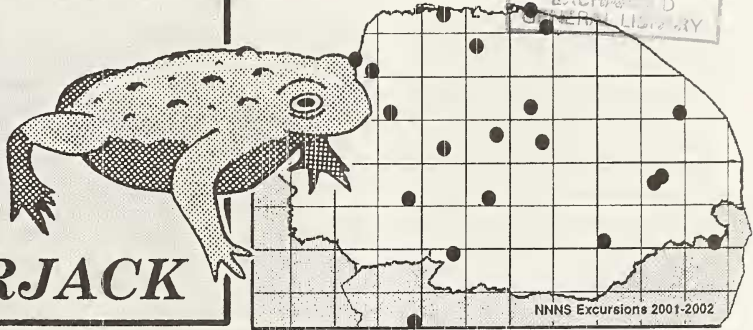


- 9 MAY 2001

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THE NORFOLK NATTERJACK



Toad-in-the-hole...

As I write this column we are approaching Easter and there is a relaxing of the restrictions in the countryside imposed by various bodies as a protection measure against the current foot and mouth outbreak. Although it is to be welcomed that as naturalists we can once again access our favourite haunts, we should not become complacent, but take what care we can when out and about. Not everything is 'back to normal' and the situation may be different by the time you read this. Please check with organisers if you are not sure that a planned event is taking place. In this edition of 'Natterjack' there are various contact numbers available including the NNNS website.

Unfortunately we have 'lost' the Royal Norfolk Show which saw our debut as exhibitors last year. Alternative venues have been investigated but as yet there are no firm details as to which shows will actually take place. In the meantime investigations within the garden can prove fruitful as many of the contributions to this Bulletin show. My thanks to those that have sent material and please let's have more for August. By the way we are told that 'one swallow doesn't make a summer' but I saw my earliest to date on 31st March at Sheringham.

FF

WELCOME BACK DAVID

After accepting nomination at the last minute, David Paull was elected, unopposed, at the AGM as chairman of the Society. David modestly pretends to know little of natural history but is an experienced chairman, having been at the helm from 1997 to 2000. In addition, he has nobly agreed to continue as chairman of the membership committee, good news as he has enrolled no fewer than 36 new members over the last year. Retiring chairman Keith Clarke had only agreed to a single year of office and was

warmly applauded for discharging his duties with a gentle hand and much humour.

Three new members of Council were elected to maintain the quota of non-officers at twelve. Two of these, Colin Penny and Rosemary Carpenter, have served previously but Alan Dixon comes aboard as the new boy. We bid farewell to David Nobbs, Tony Howes and Tony Brown all of whom have made significant contributions during their three-year stint on Council.

Tony Leech (Hon. Sec.)

NNNS PROGRAMME 2001-2002

You should have received the new programme card with this edition of 'The Norfolk Natterjack'.

Please note that some meetings may well be affected by the Foot and Mouth restrictions. If in any doubt, please check with the

leader of the meeting or Stephen Martin (01603 810327) or Bob Ellis (01603 662260) a few days before the event. We will also endeavour to post relevant information on the web site at:

www.paston.co.uk/users/golds/nnnshome.html

See also page 6 regarding the wild/lower field days

The quarterly bulletin
of the
Norfolk & Norwich
Naturalists' Society



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May 2001

Island Inspiration

I would be the first to admit that I am an infrequent visitor to meetings of the society, more likely to be seen on an excursion than at a lecture. However, with distant memories of a day trip to Guernsey on my honeymoon 21 years ago whilst staying on Jersey, I travelled to Easton College on February 20th for this year's Presidential Address, Tim Peet's presentation 'Glittering Prizes: a natural history of Guernsey'.

Our visit to Guernsey all those years ago had relatively little natural history content and I now realise that we did indeed miss some glittering prizes, but perhaps honeymoons are not the place for that sort of activity.....

Our intention to re-visit has been heightened by the delights Tim Peet shared with us, timed, of course, to see not only the albino Early Purple Orchids but also the swathes of Lax Flowered Orchid in the meadows owned by the local society. It is now apparent that there are so many other reasons for going that one visit may not be enough!

Tim Peet's modesty could not hide his vast knowledge of Guernsey, interspersing natural history attractions with geography, history and local anecdotes, all delivered with humour and an obvious respect for the island. Whilst appreciating that Guernsey, at only about 45 square miles, is not a large area of study compared to, say, Norfolk, I was left wondering how many of us knew a similar sized area so intimately - perhaps even the parishes we live in?

Many areas of interest were covered: both flowering and flowerless plants; butterflies and

moths; birds; and mole crickets, which I now know how to eradicate, if they should ever present a problem when growing my Jersey Royal potatoes under glass!

We could not fault the presentation and found it ending all too soon. The Society is surely fortunate in having Tim Peet as not only a member but also a benefactor and President. His views on natural history are refreshing in their common sense and apparent lack of elitism. I am sure it is through such people, who know their areas of study well, that the correct way forward for habitat and species conservation will be found.

On leaving Easton College I felt I had not only been informed, but both entertained and inspired. If so much could be done on a small island where the pressure on available land for development and agriculture is so high (the geographical limits being apparent), what strides could be achieved in Norfolk where there is still, at the moment, space to breathe.

Pressures on our wonderfully diverse county are increasing untempered by ineffectively applied protective legislation. Our society should be in a position to influence that change, in a metered and planned way, rather than simply witnessing and recording declines.

If I had one criticism, it is not of the lecture itself, but the overriding impression it left me with. The local society on Guernsey not only studies natural history, it seems to be interested in integrated aspects of the life and history of the island; its members also work hard on managing sites, and have raised enough money to build its own headquarters in partnership with another body.

It matters little how well read we

are, how much research we conduct, or the papers we write, can we really call ourselves 'naturalists' if we do not get out there and get ourselves dirty, spending time improving habitats and, very importantly, fight to maintain the diversity of natural life? Research has its place, but it cannot clear scrub, dig out scrapes, rebuild hibernation tunnels, or influence development in this county with so much to treasure. I feel it is really the 'doing' that makes the difference in this life and certainly on Guernsey they appear to be "dewin' wholly well".....

Sue Goldsmith

Wight - The Isle of Yesteryear

Last Autumn Wendy and I spent a week on the Isle of Wight, our first visit - it was like the Norfolk of my youth. Not much traffic, even main roads had little in the way of heavy vehicles, it was so peaceful and quiet.

We had a cottage near the beautiful village of Godshill. All around was abundant wildlife, large flocks of finches on the stubble fields, House sparrows were chirping all around the buildings. Red squirrels were seen, the first wild ones for twenty five years. On two occasions we saw Humming Bird Hawk moths, both were feeding on flowers in private gardens. There was a Badger set in the woods behind the cottage, and the calls of Rook and Jackdaw echoed over the land all day long.

The downland looked very inviting, and I could imagine in high summer those grassy slopes being alive with flowers and Butterflies. Truly a magical place and one we shall return to in the future.

Tony Hawes

Garden Birds

Geoffrey Kelly's previous list of birds seen from his house at Frettenham inspired one of us (Rita Bull) to follow suit during 1999. We had always kept a song chart, and by always, I am looking back to the late 1940s, so this did not entail a great deal extra, though it was found that not all birds heard singing were actually seen every day, so the number of bird species in the garden was probably higher on many days than the actual list.

The list was actually started on March 1st 1999 and with an 8 day period missed in late June gave a maximum possible of 298 days. During 2000, the maximum number of days was 366. We do not have the advantage of near neighbour's gardens to draw birds in, the nearest being about 400m distant. On either side we have arable. We have an orchard with an area of mixed evergreens at the top and beyond that a hedged section of former road and about two acres of mixed hardwoods planted about 18 years ago. There is a good garden area with trees and shrubs and a very small pond which attracts newts and also frogs to hibernate but not breed. Below the house is about an acre of sheep grazed pasture and then a Poplar plantation and joining it an area of rough marsh, then the River Tud and beyond this an amenity area with a very nice pond dug about 20 years ago.

Until 1995 we had grazing land with cattle on one side of us, and until that time we had up to four pairs of Starlings nesting under the roof every year and possibly as many as a dozen pairs of House Sparrows, though these latter had already started to decline before the cattle went. Until that time, however, both would have been in the

'top ten' seen every day. As it is, seven of our top ten in both years were the same as Geoffrey Kelly's. The three not in were Collared Dove 15th with 226 in 1999 and 16th with 250 in 2000 and Stock Dove with 189 in 1999 in 17th place and 14th in 2000 with 290. Starling however was only 24th with 123 in 1999 and 26th with 105 in 2000, and most of these sightings would have been simply flying over.

Our top ten had 9 species the same in both years, with Carrion Crow pushing Pheasant lower down the scale in 2000. The three species which replaced those above in Geoffrey Kelly's list were Robin with only one day missed in two years, Dunnock 9th on 285 in 1999 and first equal with 366 in 2000, and Greenfinch recorded every day in both years.

Others much reduced by comparison, House Sparrow 22nd with 134 in 1999 and 28th with 86 in 2000. Ours are visitors from that nearest house. Especially also, Skylark which has practically disappeared locally. 40th with only 47 sightings in 1999 and in 2000, 59th with only 4 sightings all year, and not even singing within earshot.

Silent Spring? Very nearly!

Alec and Rita Bull.



ARE WE INADVERTENTLY KILLING OUR GARDEN BIRDS?

As a veterinary pathologist with many years experience of diseases of birds (both wild and captive), I should like to draw to the attention of people who feed garden birds the dangers of causing them fungal infections. It is not a good idea to fill up and particularly top up, peanut holders, especially during periods of wet weather, because the nuts quickly absorb moisture.

This encourages the growth and multiplication of fungi that are capable of causing disease in birds. Damp nuts tend to stick to the bottom of peanut holders and go mouldy. All food containers should be regularly and thoroughly cleaned, sterilised with boiling water and stale food removed from feeding areas. It is advisable not to feed birds continuously in the same place, unless food containers are situated over a concrete area that can be scrubbed and disinfected, thus helping to prevent the spread of infectious agents. Contrary to a statement in a document recently circulated by the RSPB, slightly mouldy bread should NEVER be fed to birds. Indeed, stale bread that appears not to be mouldy can still harbour fungi not visible to the naked eye. The RSPB has informed me that action will be taken to correct this statement.

Food for birds should always be provided in small amounts at a time and not be replenished until everything has been eaten. This also helps to prevent the spread of other diseases such as salmonellosis.

Dr Ian F. Keymer.

VISITING COUPLES

The Norwich residential suburb of Eaton Rise is located adjacent to the Yare Valley and bound around two sides by a golf course and copses which have grown out of marl pits.

The writer's garden abuts on to the golf course from which interesting species of wildlife traffic. Highlights of such visitors in this past month have been a pair - dog and vixen - of fox and a pair of muntjac deer. The fox visit occurred around 09:30 hours and they both came within five yards of our lounge windows. The physical condition of both animals appeared to be quite splendid. After an investigation of the garden over a period of about three minutes they then moved at great speed into a neighbours garden. The strong urine scent these animal left behind was to be preferred to any domestic feline!

The muntjac pair - male and female - have become very regular visitors (between 07:00 and 09:00 hours usually). These, unfortunately, we must restrain from entry since they browse on the emerging and more tasty leaves and shoots of numerous plants including bluebells, crocus, kniphofia, bergenia etc.

The bird life to be seen is a continuous source of interest. All three species of woodpeckers are seen, a sparrowhawk clobbering a wood pigeon, daily close ups of families of jays and magpies, pairs of bullfinches, goldcrests and nesting of robin, blue tit, great tit, song thrush, collared dove, blackbird and long-tailed tit.

It was with sorrow and anger that we noted the destruction of the nest of a long-tailed tit bearing nine eggs - probably by a neighbours

cat. The building of the nest of the long-tailed tit in a berberis some three yards from our lounge window, had occupied our delighted attention over a period of about a month. The beautiful nest structure was dragged out of the bush and the eggs left uneaten below.

Grass snakes - pairs we presume - have been observed near the compost heaps whilst their egg shell and very young grass snakes have been seen near this compost.

It is possible that at some future date our members will read in this publication 'Garden for Sale with House included'.

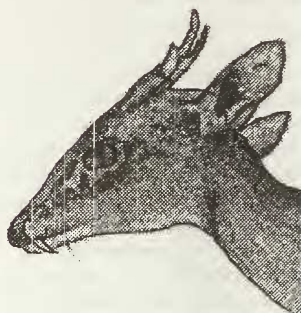
Gordon Livingstone

THE LITTLE FELLOW

For the last two weeks Wendy and I have travelled most days to see her sick father at Addenbrooks Hospital in Cambridge.

Some of the route passes through the Brecks, so when Wendy was driving I have been looking out for deer. Only two Roe have been seen so far and one Red but the tiny Muntjac (*Muntiacus reevesi*) seems very numerous. Often a count of six seen on one journey, usually just a few yards into the woodland, even travelling at seventy m.p.h. the eye can pick them up fairly easily. Based on these sightings and those nearer home this small deer must be well established in Norfolk and Suffolk woodlands at the moment, probably our most numerous species now. We often see them in the mixed woodland at Thorpe, especially where bramble and low scrub abounds.

Apparently all these animals are descendants from a few escaped from Woburn Park in Bedfordshire. The male has small antlers but long canines that make it look a bit like Christopher Lee on a bad day.



When disturbed they often give a sharp bark of alarm. I would not imagine that they do much damage as they seem to eat mostly low shrubs and bramble leaves. I find these animals a pleasing addition to our woodlands.

Tony Howes
March 2001

50 Years Ago

An extract from the NNNS
Transactions of 1951

BANANA SPIDER

A female of the large poisonous spider *Ctenus forus* (Perty) was found with bananas in a Norwich warehouse in May, 1951. It produced an egg-cocoon in July and the young emerged in great numbers early in September, after which they were deposited at London Zoo. This species has been recorded as native in Brazil and Paraguay.

R.M. Barnes

Missing 'Squiggle' FUNGUS STUDY GROUP

According to my copy of the Little Oxford English Dictionary the word 'squiggle' denotes:

- a) wavy or curly line
- b) wriggle

I expect by my omission of a) from the last 'Natterjack'. I caused b) as frustrated attempts by members to log on failed!

My apologies to those of you who suffered from the missing squiggle (insert before richard) Please find the correct version of the Fungus Study Group site below:

<http://homepages.tesco.net/~richard.shotbolt/nfsg>

I have tried it and it does work!

FF
Editor

AN APPROPRIATE HOST FOR JEW'S EAR

The Jew's-ear fungus must be familiar to almost all naturalists; it is common, distinctive and has a vernacular name which - at least as far as the ear part is concerned - is appropriate. It can be eaten, although not strong in the flavour department, and has a long history of use in Chinese traditional medicine and in Western herbal treatments (for the usual wide range of unconnected conditions).

Its normal host is elder on which its pinkish-brown gelatinous lobes can be found at any time of year. This is the association which explains the name of the fungus

(a mistranslation of the mediaeval Latin, *auricula Judae* - Judas's ear) for on this tree Judas Iscariot is said to have hanged himself. The scientific name of the fungus reinforces this with *Auricularia* (a little ear) *auricula-judae*.

Another legend has it that Judas hanged himself not on elder but on *Cercis siliquastrum*, known, in his honour, as the Judas-tree. This member of the pea family sprouts clusters of pink flowers directly from the bark and is commonly grown in gardens but, like elder, occurs naturally in western Asia.

Jew's-ear fungus is, in fact, quite catholic in its tastes, occurring on, amongst other woody hosts, sycamore, ash, oak, elm, willow, beech, hazel, and alder. In a study in the north-east, only 62% of the finds were on elder, with 20% on sycamore, 9% on wych elm and the remainder on five different species. Nevertheless it came as a surprise when a friend recently presented me with a piece of a Judas-tree branch bearing a Jew's-ear fungus.

Tony Leech

Although not such an appropriate host as the above I recently found Jew's-ear on another plant other than Elder - an old woody Buddleja trunk in the garden.

FF

A not so common 'Grey Mould'

During a spate of correspondence about snowdrops on the Norfolk Wildlife e-groups I remembered seeing a grey mould on some snowdrop plants that I had been moving around in a garden at Tibenham earlier this year.

I had found the mould in the centres of the largest and densest clumps of snowdrops. It was attacking the base of the leaves causing them to rot off at ground level.

I had thought little about the mould at that time, just throwing the affected bulbs away and replanting the rest. I had assumed that it was the common grey mould that attacked many species of plants in the garden.

However, on checking in Ellis & Ellis 'Microfungi on Land Plants' I found the mould was *Botrytis galanthina*, a species specific to snowdrops. They suggest this species is found predominantly in northern England but since I can remember seeing it in several other gardens locally over the years I wondered how common it really was - so I looked on the British Mycological Society website. On their species database they had recorded - three records!

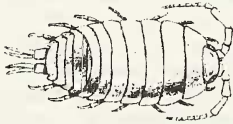
Maybe those 'stay-at-home' naturalists amongst us could be making as good a contribution to wildlife recording as those who spend half the day travelling to the wildernesses of Norfolk.

Robert Maidstone



SLATER DAY

With the current restrictions on visiting the countryside, I have been turning my attention more to what is still accessible - in my case, the sea and beach. I visit the Quay here at Wells regularly, and occasionally you get a "Slater day". The Sea Slater *Ligia oceanica* is a very large woodlouse, sometimes 50mm long, but of the same shape and proportions as the familiar woodlice of the genera *Oniscus* and *Porcellio*. Being inhabitants of rocky coasts, they are not exactly common in Norfolk. I imagine they must always be here on the Quay, but you only see them in particular weather conditions, basically dull and damp. Even then you can't rely on their being around, but when they do appear it can be in impressive numbers.



The large Victorian dressed stones forming the quay edge, and especially the cracks and gaps between them, are presumably the slaters' home, but they are truly amphibious, apparently happy to be crawling on the "rocks" or swimming nearby. I like them; they seem as truly inhabitants of the quay as the gulls, swans and mallards, and the Turnstones which now regularly appear in winter - up to 19 on one day this year, by the way. If any of you have come across Sea Slaters elsewhere in Norfolk, I should be interested to hear. Strangely enough, I have never seen one at West Runton, our nearest approach to a rock-pool coast.

Paul Banham

THE SQUEALER

Thirty odd years or so ago I had permission to walk and birdwatch over a farm at Postwick in the Yare Valley. Part of this walk involved the twenty yard buffer zone of willow scrub and sedge between the river and the grazing marshes. I remember well that Water Rails (*Rallus aquaticus*) were a common sight and sound in those days, the pig like squeal would often erupt from the margins of the swamp ahead as I walked through the tangle of bushes and sedge.

This was brought home to me last week when I walked round Strumpshaw Fen late one evening. Suddenly there it was - that peculiar high pitched, injured pig like squeal, followed by a few low grunting sounds, they were coming from an overgrown sedge and reed bed. I stopped and listened a few minutes and there it was again, it brought back memories of those nearby trips many years before.

You can imagine primitive peoples hearing this blood curdling sound coming from the swamps as they passed by, They would probably pull their cloaks a little bit tighter as they cast a nervous glance in that direction and hurried on their way, fearful of the "Swamp Devils" that lived there.



Tony Howes
February 2001

Know that Wildflower?

The Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society has arranged a series of four field meetings over the spring and summer designed as an introduction to the identification of wild flowers. They are open to members and non-members of the society but the aim is to encourage as many people as possible to attend, not only 'beginners' and those 'starting out', but also those botanists who have experience and knowledge that they would like to share.

Enclosed with this issue of *Natterjack* is a leaflet giving details of all the times and venues, so please make a note in your diary and then pass the leaflet on to anyone that you think may be interested, or pin it up in your workplace, library, school, college etc. The first meeting is scheduled for Sunday 13th May, at 10.30 am at Foxley Wood NWT reserve. In view of the uncertainty over access due to foot & mouth restrictions, there will be an answerphone message on 01263 587 499 from Monday 7th May onwards giving an update on access (and possibly an alternative venue; similar messages will be posted, if necessary, in the week before the following meetings).

Simon & Anne Harrap



Stigmella aurella in Norfolk (The Bramble Pigmy)

All records please to:
Jon Clifton, Kestrel Cottage, Station Road,
Hindolveston, Norfolk, NR20 5DE.
jon.clifton@btinternet.com

One of Norfolk's most widespread moths is the Nepticulid leaf mining moth *Stigmella aurella*, but a quick look at the attached distribution map shows that there have been very few records sent in, so may I ask any recorders to submit their sightings to me at the address above (and I will forward them to our county recorders).

The larva of *Stigmella aurella* mine the leaves of bramble in a long and twisting whitish gallery which is very distinctive and noticeable. It is thought to be continually brooded so can be seen throughout the year,



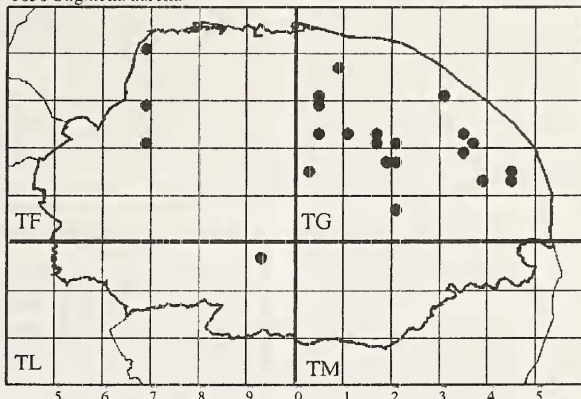
especially in the evergreen varieties, so its presence can be found with ease. I found this was just the case while on

the way home from work. In just two days stopping the car in a different 2km grid square near a patch of bramble and on inspection I had found the mines within seconds.... its as easy as that! (you can see where I live by looking at the map!) you have probably got it in your garden so go out and look.

The only other species to watch for on bramble that feed in this way are *Emmetia marginea* but its mine is whiter and broader than *S. aurella* and *Stigmella splendissimella* which usually prefer dewberry to bramble, so in winter this is no problem as dewberry are deciduous and will not be present.

Jon Clifton

0050 *Stigmella aurella*



Blackbird Delight!

It's 6am on a grey and drizzly morning but I'm full of the delights of Spring! For the third morning in a row I have been woken up early by the Blackbird singing just outside the bedroom window. What a marvellous way to start the day! I don't mind that it's early and I could have had another hours sleep at least! At this time of the year like so many of us, I am looking forward to hearing the first Chiff-Chaff, Willow Warbler, Blackcap etc., but the lovely mellow sound of the Blackbird to me is Spring at it's best!

What a great English sound that is! I just had to get up and tap this out to express my delight. Whilst I waited for the kettle to boil for the inevitable cup of tea I had a look out of the back door to be greeted by the Song Thrush singing from nearby. What more do you need!!! As always this Spring I have waited to record the first Chiff Chaff etc: (Chiff-Chaff: 23.3.01; Willow Warbler 5.4.01; Blackcap: 6.4.01.) but the Blackbird "insists" on being recorded!

Roger Clarke



P.S. If you fancy taking part in a newt survey - see back page

Newts on South Norfolk Commons

A biodiversity project focussing on the common lands of South Norfolk is being proposed by a partnership that includes Norfolk Wildlife Trust, English Nature and South Norfolk Council. Details on this project will be circulated to other prospective partners in the near future and a scoping is planned for the coming months. Amongst the information needed to inform the project, is a better idea of the distribution of great crested newt on the South Norfolk Commons. Funding for this part of the project has been kindly offered by the Herpetofauna Conservation Trust.

The proposal, at present, is to survey ponds on South Norfolk Commons in the spring and early summer of this year. If you are interested in taking part in the South Norfolk Commons survey work, and being a part of the volunteer survey team, then please contact me.

Helen Baczkowska,
Biodiversity Project Officer,
Norfolk Wildlife Trust.
Tel: 01603 625540

THE LAST GUARDIAN



With Billy Bishop (Cley), Ted Eales (Blakeney Point) the name Bob Chestney (Scolt Head) was synonymous with wild birds and their early protection along the north Norfolk coast for many of us. Their annual bird summaries as respective wardens were regular features of the *Bird and Mammal Reports* of the 50s and 60s.

It was, therefore, with sadness that I read in the *Eastern Daily Press* of the death of Bob Chestney on March 31st, aged 75.

Bob Chestney was unforgettable - the first sighting was usually of this wind burnt red-brown character in shorts and wild hair appearing through the dunes and coming up to enquire what you were about. Having satisfied himself that you were not going to harm *his* birds he settled into jovial mood and a teller of tales - some of the rather tall variety!

During an NYN excursion in 1969 Bob regaled the young nats with stories of the 1953 flood and how afterwards the samphire had to be carried over the shoulder as it was the size of a small Christmas tree!

My visits to Scolt over the years have regrettably been infrequent yet I will not forget those early days watching the Sandwich Terns and hearing their raucous calls over the wind, whilst listening to Bob's tales. He was a countryman, a naturalist who inspired and above all a true guardian of our natural heritage. Long may we remember him as the man of Scolt Head and its terns.

Francis Farrow

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Members who pay by cheque are reminded that subscriptions fell due on 1 April, 2001. Current rates are £12 for ordinary and family members and £15 for affiliated groups. Please make cheques payable to Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society and send them to the Treasurer:

DI Richmond,
42, Richmond Rise,
Reephham,
Norfolk, NR10 4LS.



Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society subscription form:

From:.....

Address:.....

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A note to CONTRIBUTORS.

The next *Natterjack* will be in August. It would be much appreciated if any correspondence could be sent to the following address, *as soon as possible by July 1st*, and marked with NNNS on the envelope. For those with access to a computer a WORD document or an ordinary text file on disc would be most helpful, or you can send an e-mail to: francis.f@virgin.net

FF

Francis Farrow
'Heathlands'
6 Havelock Road
Sheringham
Norfolk
NR26 8QD

